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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1979

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by BRETT HALLDAY

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE PHOENIX GAMBIT

by Brett Halliday

When Tim Rourke went to the small Bay town to help a fellow newsman, Mike Shayne went along for the ride. The Miami detective soon found that the ride might become a one-way trip to the morgue! 5

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

First of all, let us apologize three times to JOSEPH COMMINGS for misspelling his name on last month's cover, on the table of contents, and on the excellent story *Stairway to Nowhere*, which he wrote with Ed Hoch. JOSEPH COMMINGS is a New York writer who served in the Army during World War II, was active in the New York chapter of the *Mystery Writers of America* during the 1950s, and contributed short stories to four MWA anthologies.

JOSEPH COMMINGS' mysteries — many about Senator Brooks U. Banner — appeared in *Ten Detective Aces*, *Mystery Digest*, *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, and other publications. During the 1960s and early 1970s, JOSEPH COMMINGS published a number of paperback novels outside the mystery field. JOSEPH COMMINGS now resides in Maryland.

Once in a while we get in a manuscript that is just too long to include in one issue. Up till now we've been returning them, often with tears in our editorial eyes, but with this issue we're trying an experiment — breaking the story in two parts, printing one now and the conclusion in the next issue. *Death on the Strip* is our two-parter by GARY BRANDNER, featuring Oriental detective Sammy Chung. Let us know what you think of it.

JOHN BALL is no stranger to our pages. You've been enjoying his book review columns here for the past several issues. Currently regional Vice-president of the Mystery Writers of America and Chairman of the Board and Editor-in Chief of the University of California Mystery Library, John is perhaps best known for his book *In the Heat of the Night*, which was made into a major motion picture. He has written twenty-five books which have been translated into twenty-eight languages in thirty-five countries.

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THE PHOENIX GAMBIT

by Brett Halliday

Tim Rourke Went to the Small Bay Town to Look Into his Friend's Death. Mike Shayne went Along for the Ride. It Wasn't Long Before the Big Redheaded Miami Detective and His Newsman Friend Were Up to Their Ears in a Mess that Could Cost Both of Them Their Lives!

THE LATE AFTERNOON SUN was turning orange as it descended toward the waters of the Gulf. Despite the lowering sun, it was still hot on this late summer day, and sweat dripped into the eyes of a burly, middle-aged man as he wrestled a heavy trunk up a flight of stairs.

The stairs were in a large old frame house that sat on a grassy knoll overlooking a little slough. While it had seen better days, the house was still an impressive structure, and to get a better look at it was one of the reasons that the burly man, whose name was Joe Devon, had taken this temporary job as a mover.

Of course, the money had helped, too. He had been in his favorite bar in the nearby town of Port McCall, a place prosaically named *Angie's Bar and Grill*, when a man in a sharp three-hundred-dollar suit had come in looking for some guys who wanted to earn a fast buck. The job was out at the old Barrymore place, and it paid fifty dollars for a day's work.

That was good money, and Joe had always wanted a closer look at the mansion Eustace Barrymore had built back in the twenties. It was supposed to be quite a place. Might even be a story in it, Joe had thought. He could write about it when he finished the stuff he was working on now, when he had shown the world that Joe Devon was still a damn good reporter . . .

So Joe had shown up at the Barrymore estate at the time the man had said, the only one of the locals to do so. He supposed that all the other able-bodied men were out fishing. That was all right with Joe. He had never really gotten along with most of the people in Port McCall and had never felt at home there. Miami was still his town.

Two big moving vans were pulled up in front of the house with its old-fashioned gables and spires. The man who had come into Angie's was there, too, and he said to Joe, "Sorry nobody else showed up. You don't mind hard work, do you?"

"No, sir." Joe shook his head, already wishing he had a drink.

"Okay. You and the drivers can unload these trucks. All the cartons are marked first floor or second floor, and that's all that matters. You don't have to worry about which room they go in. Just put 'em anywhere."

So the day had been a long one, as the three men unloaded the big trucks. Joe was so dry by lunchtime that he started sneaking quick sips from the little flask he carried.

Now, the trucks were empty, and this trunk Joe was wrestling with was the last item to be carried in. Naturally, since it was so heavy, it went on the second floor.

Joe had been more than a little disappointed in the house itself. It bore little resemblance to the

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famed pleasure palace of Boot-legger Barrymore that he had heard so many stories about. It was just a big, old house, solidly built over-all but needing some repair in a few places.

The two truck drivers, who were taciturn almost to the point of being mute, and the man who had hired him were the only ones around the place. It had been a day of hot, dull, thirsty work, and Joe was more than ready to collect his fifty dollars and head back to Angie's. That's just what he would do as soon as he got this monster of a trunk upstairs.

He leaned back, pulling with all the muscles in his shoulders and back. The trunk was riding on an aluminum dolly, and it took all of Joe's strength to work it up one step at a time.

The position he was in, he couldn't help but notice the brass plate on the end of the trunk with its engraved letters — LJS. He supposed they stood for whoever it was that was moving into the house. He had the feeling that the man who had hired him was also an employee of someone else.

Joe pulled once again and the dolly bumped up over the last step. It was easier to balance now, and it took him only a few minutes to wheel the trunk down the hall and put it in the big room where he had been leaving all the other stuff. He left it there, dusted his hands off, and headed downstairs. He wanted to collect his money

and get out of there.

He found the man in the expensive suit on the verandah that ran along the front of the house. Joe came out the front door and said, "Okay, that's all of it. I left the dolly upstairs in case you need it to move some of the heavy stuff around."

The man had been leaning a hip on the porch railing. He straightened and put his hand in his pocket, pulling out a folded fifty-dollar bill. He said, "Here you go, buddy. You did a good job."

"Thanks." Joe slipped the money into his shirt pocket and decided to indulge his reporter's curiosity. "Say, just who is it that bought the place? Not somebody from around here, I'd imagine."

"You're right. It's nobody from around here." The man's tone was brisk, almost curt. He turned away to light a cigarette, and Joe realized that he had been dismissed.

It wouldn't do any good to press the point. Joe gave a mental shrug and started down the steps to the lawn.

Just then, a long black car turned into the driveway and came toward the house. Joe heard the man on the porch mutter, "Damn . . . !"

In his years as a reporter, Joe Devon had learned that sometimes it's smarter to look dumb. He put a slightly vacant expression on his face and walked across the yard,

giving the car only a casual glance as it passed him.

During that instant, though, his eyes saw plainly the man who was riding in the back seat. The booze had dimmed his once-keen vision, but only slightly.

There was something familiar about the man in the car. Joe had seen him or a picture of him not too long ago. He couldn't quite put a name with the face, though.

Well, he knew he would come up with it sooner or later, and if the man in the car was a celebrity like Joe thought he might be, there would indeed be a story in the old Barrymore house . . .

Joe was out of earshot before the car pulled up in front of the verandah. The man in the rear seat got out, his motions lithe and pantherish; his features a mask of cold anger. He looked at Joe's figure plodding away across the lawn and snapped, "Who the hell was that?"

The man on the porch looked nervous as he answered, "Just some local rube I hired to help us move the stuff in."

"I thought I told you there were to be no outsiders here."

"We needed help to get the trunks unloaded on time. They were late getting here, you know. I don't think him being here will hurt anything, boss. He didn't hardly pay any attention to you."

"I didn't get where I am by relying on you to do my thinking,

Brock. I want that man taken care of. There's no point in taking chances."

"But that would be risky, too —"

"I don't pay you to argue with me, Brock. Just do as I say."

"Yes, sir," the man called Brock said, but he didn't look happy about it at all.

Several hours later, Joe Devon was sitting in a rear booth at Angie's, nursing a drink and still trying to put a name with the face. He wanted to go ahead and identify the man, so he could quit worrying about it and start some serious drinking.

Suddenly, a connection made in his brain. He had forgotten about the initials on the trunk. LJS . . . They had a familiar ring, too. Maybe they had something to do with the series of articles he was working on in his spare time.

Just like that, things fell into place. He knew where he had seen the man before, and he knew what the initials stood for. Joe Devon shook his head in confusion and muttered to himself, "I thought he was dead."

This would be a story, all right, a honey of a story. Maybe the most important one he had ever covered. It was too much for him alone, though. He would need help, and he knew where to get it.

He stood up and went to the

phone booth at the end of the bar. After a moment of dropping coins in the slot and having them fall straight through, he called to the attractive woman behind the bar, "Hey, Angie, what's wrong with this damn phone?"

Angie shrugged. "Beats me, Joe. It was working okay earlier."

Joe hung the receiver up disgustedly. There was a booth at the service station down the street. He left the bar and headed for it, weaving just slightly.

The station was closed, just like nearly everything else in Port McCall after dark. The bars and the bait stands were all that were open now. Joe cut through the shadows next to the gas pumps and found the phone booth. The phone in this one worked.

"I want to make a person-to-person call to Tim Rourke in Miami," he told the operator. "He's probably at the *Daily News* office, so try there first."

After a couple of rings at the other end, a preoccupied voice answered, "Yeah, *Daily News*, Rourke speaking."

The operator told him to hold and told Joe how much money to deposit. When the coins had dropped, Joe said, "Tim, is that you?"

"Yeah, who's this?"

"It's Joe, Joe Devon. How're you doing, Tim?"

"Joe! Good to hear from you, man. I'm fine; how about you?"

"I'm okay. In fact, I'm just great, Tim. I've latched onto one

hell of a story. Do you think you could help me get it into print?"

Rourke laughed. "Well, sure, if it's any good. Why don't you tell me about it?"

"Okay, here's what happened —"

Joe never saw the man who came out of the shadows. All he knew was that an arm suddenly looped around his throat and tightened, cutting off his air and jerking him away from the phone. The receiver slipped from his fingers. Tim Rourke's voice came from it. "Joe! Joe, what is it? What's wrong?"

Joe tried to fight back, but it wasn't any use. He had been drinking too much for too long. His muscles didn't work the way they used to.

And then they didn't work at all. Joe Devon slumped to the asphalt. The shadowy figure above him used Joe's shirt to wipe off the blade of his knife before he stood up.

The receiver swung back and forth on the end of its cord, and across the street, Tim Rourke was still shouting, "Joe! Joe!"

The killer hung up the phone before he faded away into the night.

II

"YOU'RE TENSE, MICHAEL. You have to relax."

"Mmmmm . . ." Mike Shayne sighed as Lucy Hamilton dug her

slender, supple fingers into the corded muscles of his shoulders.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and Shayne was stretched out on the sofa in his apartment. He had put in a full night chasing down some jewel thieves. He had caught up with them and recovered the stolen gems, but not without hard work and danger. The insurance company that had hired him was exceedingly grateful, though, to the tune of several thousand dollars, and Shayne had decided that even redheaded private detectives deserved a day off now and then.

So he had called Lucy and told her not to worry about opening up the office, just to get her pretty self over to his place for a day of rest and relaxation.

Shayne, felt himself growing sleepy as Lucy continued the massage. They had breakfasted well on sausage and eggs and coffee laced with cognac. He was trying to decide whether they should stay in or go out for the rest of the day, maybe to the beach for some swimming.

An urgent pounding on the door interrupted the peaceful interlude. Shayne jerked his head up, glared, and rumbled, "What the hell?"

Lucy rose from the edge of the sofa and said, "I'll get it, Michael. You stay put."

When she swung the door open, a man who was thin almost to the point of gauntness rushed in. His suit looked like it had been slept

in every night for at least a week. Stubble dotted his cheeks, and a cigarette drooped from his lips. He said, "I looked for you at your office, Mike. What are you doing home? You declare a holiday or something?"

"One of the advantages of being self-employed." Shayne waved at an armchair. "Sit down, Tim. You look like a man with problems."

Tim Rourke sat down as Lucy resumed her position on the sofa next to Shayne. The lanky ace reporter asked, "Do you remember Joe Devon, Mike?"

Shayne propped himself up on one elbow and used his free hand to tug at his left earlobe. "A reporter, isn't he? I didn't know he was still in Miami."

"He's not. He lost his wife a few years ago and moved over to the Gulf Coast, to a little fishing town called Port McCall. I hadn't heard from him in a long time."

"But you have now," Shayne guessed.

"Yeah. He called me last night, said he had a big story he wanted my help in breaking."

"What was it?"

"I don't know. He was murdered before he could tell me."

Shayne sat up abruptly, nearly dislodging Lucy. He slid a brawny arm around her trim waist to steady her and frowned at Tim Rourke. "Murdered? How do you know?"

Rourke's face was solemn as he handed Shayne a piece of

paper. "Our conversation was cut off in the middle last night, and I wondered what had happened. Then I took that story off the wire this morning and found out."

Shayne quickly scanned the piece of paper. It contained only two paragraphs, a terse account of the finding of Joe Devon's body by a service station attendant. Death had been caused by a stab wound in the heart, and Devon's wallet was gone. The local authorities were chalking it up as a robbery-murder.

Shayne handed the story back to Rourke. "You say he was killed while the two of you were talking?"

Rourke leaned back in the chair and took a drag on his cigarette. "Yeah, and I think it was because of what he was going to tell me. I can't prove it, Mike, but my gut says I'm right. Joe was just about to tell me what he had found out when it sounded like he was jerked away from the phone. I heard what sounded like a struggle for a few seconds, then somebody hung up the phone. I don't think it was Joe."

With his gray eyes fixed on Rourke's face, Shayne rasped a thumbnail along his jaw and said, "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to drive over to Port McCall and see what I can find out about it. Joe Devon was a good man and a good reporter, even if he did start hitting the

bottle pretty heavy when his wife died. I don't want the local cops just writing this killing off."

Shayne stood up and stretched his weary muscles. "Want some company?"

A grin split Rourke's face. "I was hoping you'd say that."

"I thought that this was supposed to be a day off for you, Michael," Lucy said.

Shayne ruffled her soft brown hair slightly with a big hand. "I thought so, too, Angel. But Tim's liable to need some help with those Port McCall cops. They may not like a reporter nosing around."

Rourke chuckled. "They may not care for you, either, Mike."

"A lot of cops don't like me, but I'm still here."

"A little the worse for wear sometimes," Lucy added tartly.

Shayne gave her a grin. "Maybe Tim and I can wrap this up today, and you and I can take tomorrow off, Angel."

"I hope so."

"So do I. Come on, Tim. We can go in my car, but you do the driving, okay? This shamus had a hell of a night. He needs a nap."

III

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON when Shayne and Rourke cruised into Port McCall in Shayne's Buick. The redhead was behind the wheel now, having taken over from Rourke after several hours of

sleep. Shayne glanced around the town and said, "Not much to it, is there?"

"I think that's why Joe came here," Rourke replied. "He wanted peace and quiet."

"Plenty of that here," Shayne grunted.

Port McCall had only one main street and a few cross streets in its business district. The Gulf was a block away, and Shayne could see the masts of a few boats in the basin. Most of the shrimpers were still out. He brought the Buick to a stop at the town's one red light and reflected that this was quite a difference from the hustle and bustle of Miami.

Rourke pointed at a one story stucco building and said, "There's the police station and city hall."

Shayne nodded and, when the light changed, piloted the Buick over to the building's little parking lot. As they got out of the car, the rangy detective said, "Maybe we'll be lucky and they'll have caught the killer already."

"Yeah, maybe." Rourke didn't sound like he believed it.

They went through a glass door into an air-conditioned corridor. On one side of the hall was the police department; on the other, municipal offices. Rourke led the way into the police department.

There were two desks and some filing cabinets behind a wooden railing. In the far wall was a door marked *Chief*. No one was in sight.

"Hey," Rourke raised his voice, "anybody home?"

The door to the chief's office opened and a gray, grizzled head popped out. "Yeah?" the man growled, seemingly none too happy about it.

"Are you the chief of police?" Rourke asked.

"Yeah, I'm Chief Jasper. What is it you fellas want?"

"To ask you some questions. Mind if we come in?" Without waiting for an answer, Rourke pushed through the gate in the railing and strode briskly toward the chief's office. Shayne followed him silently, content to let Tim do the talking for the moment.

Jasper didn't move from his stance in the door, so Rourke had to come to a stop. When he did, the chief asked, "Just who might you be, and what is it you want to know?"

"Tim Rourke, *Miami Daily News*." He held up his press credentials. "I'd like to ask you some questions about the murder of Joe Devon."

Jasper shrugged. "Devon got himself robbed and killed. What more do you want to know?"

"Have you arrested his killer?"

"Nope."

"Do you have any suspects?"

"A lot of transients come through here, mister. It could have been any one of them. Why the hell is somebody from Miami interested in a two-bit knifing?"

Rourke's face was grim as he

answered, "Joe Devon was my friend."

Jasper frowned but said nothing for a moment. After the pause, he looked at Shayne and asked, "You a friend of Devon's, too?"

Shayne shook his head. "I hardly knew the man. I just came along for the ride."

"Where was Devon killed?" Rourke asked.

"At a service station right down the street. If you came in from the east, you passed it."

Shayne remembered the station, remembered that there had been a phone booth there. That could tie in with Tim's idea that Devon had been killed while talking to him.

"Have you got the time of death narrowed down?" Rourke went on.

"Sometime last night is the best we could do. The body wasn't found until early this morning." Jasper looked as if their presence was making him extremely unhappy. He went on, "I can understand your concern, but you'd best just leave this to us. We'll get the killer if he's still around."

Rourke started to say something else, but Shayne overrode him. "My name is Mike Shayne," the redhead said. "You may have heard of me. I just want you to know that Rourke and I intend to see Joe Devon's killer brought to justice."

Rourke was giving him a funny look by the time he finished the

speech, but Chief Jasper was turning red with anger and indignation. He snapped, "I've heard of you, all right, Shayne, and I don't like what you're implying. I run a clean force here, and I do the best I can with what I've got."

"I just wanted you to know where we stood," the big detective said. "By the way, where are all your men?"

"Port McCall doesn't need a big force," Jasper said. "There are only six of us. Two of the others are off duty now, and the other three are out on patrol, if it's any of your business."

"I'm making everything about this town my business," Shayne said harshly. "Come on, Tim." He stalked out of the building with Rourke following him.

By the time the reporter caught up with him outside, Shayne had a big grin on his rugged face. Rourke asked worriedly, "Why the hard line, Mike? I thought we'd keep a low profile, for a little while, anyway."

Shayne paused before getting into his Buick. "Did you ever see a hornets' nest, Tim?" he asked.

"Yeah, sure. What's that got to do with this?"

"You get a hell of a lot more action if you poke the nest a few times and get the hornets stirred up. That cop Jasper was suspicious of us as soon as we came in. He started getting nervous when you asked him about Devon,

and he got just plain scared when I put our cards on the table. That seems a little strange, doesn't it, when the official position is that Devon was killed during a robbery?"

Rourke looked thoughtful. "Yeah, you're right, unless the official position is nothing but a cover-up. Is that what you're thinking?"

"It's a possibility. Jasper's spooked, that's for sure. If he gets spooked enough, maybe he'll do something to give us some answers. In the meantime, we can do some asking around about Devon, maybe find someone who knew him."

The two of them got back in the car and Shayne said, "Do you think a man could find a place to get a drink in this town?"

A moment later, as they cruised back down the street, they noticed the neon sign in the window of *Angie's Bar and Grill*. Shayne wheeled the Buick into the lot beside the little building, and he and Rourke went inside. The interior was cool and rather dim compared to the late afternoon sunlight. There were only a few customers scattered along the bar and at the tables. Shayne and Rourke settled onto a couple of vacant stools at the near end of the bar.

An attractive brunette in her late thirties was working behind the bar. She came over to them and asked, "Yes? Can I help

you?"

"Double Scotch," Rourke said. The woman nodded.

"Do you have Martell?" Shayne asked.

"I think so." Judging from the woman's expression, her customers didn't ask for cognac very often.

"Double sidecar, ice water on the side."

"Sure." As she set up their drinks, she glanced out the corner of her eye at them. "You boys aren't from around here, are you?"

"No." Shayne sampled his drink and nodded approvingly. "We're from Miami."

"Just passing through?"

"That depends. Are you Angie?"

The woman smiled. "That's me. Why?"

"Have you lived in Port McCall very long?"

"Fifteen years."

"Then you probably know most of the people around here." Shayne paused and took another sip of his drink, then said, "We're looking for a man named Joe Devon."

Angie's brow creased in a frown. "Joe . . . Devon? Was he a friend of yours?"

Shayne nodded.

"And you haven't heard?" Angie went on. Her voice was tight and tense.

"Heard what?" Rourke put in, following Shayne's lead.

"Joe Devon was killed last night."

Shayne and Rourke both put surprised expressions on their faces. The redhead exclaimed, "Killed? Where? What happened?"

"It was right down the street there, at the gas station. Somebody stabbed him and took his wallet."

Shayne shook his head. "Hell of a thing to happen."

"Was Joe still doing any newspaper work?" Rourke asked.

Angie looked baffled. "Newspaper work? You mean like deliveries?"

"No, Joe used to be a reporter. We worked together in Miami."

Angie shook her head. "First I've heard of it. Joe mainly did odd jobs when he needed money. In fact, just yesterday he hired on with a fella who came in here looking for help. At least Joe said he was going out to the Barrymore place . . ."

"The Barrymore place," Shayne said. "What's that?"

"It's a big old house outside of town. There's a story about how a rich bootlegger had it built a long time ago, but I don't know if it's true or not."

"Did you know the man who came in here?"

"Never saw him before."

"Did he say what kind of work it was?"

"I'm afraid not. Say, do you think that might've had something

to do with Joe getting killed?"

Shayne finished his drink with a long swallow. "Maybe. Does the chief of police know about that?"

"I didn't tell him. It didn't seem important. I don't know if anybody else did or not."

Shayne would have been willing to bet that Chief Jasper did know about Devon working at the Barrymore place. Some gut-level instinct developed during years of detective work told the redhead that there was a definite connection here. He was about to ask Angie how to find the Barrymore place when someone bumped him from behind. A deep voice growled, "Watch where you're going, you big redheaded ox!"

Shayne swung around on the stool, his jaw tightening. He glared at the big man who stood there with a belligerent look on his face.

"You ran into me, friend," Shayne said, trying to keep his anger in check.

"I sure as hell didn't!" the man bellowed. He looked like a capable bruiser, with broad shoulders and hands like hams.

Tim Rourke put in, "I suppose the stool jumped out in front of you."

The man turned to him and sneered, "Shut up, wimp."

Rourke paled and started to stand up. Shayne put a hand on his friend's arm and cautioned, "Take it easy, Tim."

Angie was beginning to look

nervous. She said hurriedly, "I don't like trouble in my place . . ."

"There won't be any trouble." Shayne began to turn back toward the bar. "No harm done."

"Don't turn your back on me, you bastard!" the big man yelled, grabbing Shayne's shoulder and jerking the redhead around. He launched a piledriver punch at Shayne's rugged jaw.

The blow never connected. Shayne slipped off the stool and ducked his head to one side. The punch smashed through empty air where Shayne's head had been an instant before.

The big detective pulled out of his assailant's grip and gave the man a shove, putting some distance between them. Shayne snapped, "Hold it! I don't want trouble."

"Well, I do," the man growled. His lips twisted in a grimace and he waded in, both arms swinging wild punches.

Angie screamed as Shayne blocked as many of the blows as he could. A couple of them landed on his torso but did no damage. Shayne began a counterattack of his own with a right cross that slipped through his opponent's guard and clipped him on the jaw, rocking him.

The patrons of the bar had backed off, giving the battlers room, except for Rourke, who stood close by in the unlikely event that Shayne needed help. Angie had snatched up a tele-

phone behind the bar and was calling the police.

Shayne's opponent was raining punches on him as hard and fast as he could. His style was pure bare-knuckled brawler. Shayne blocked most of the blows, but some of them got through, and they were beginning to hurt. It was time to take the offensive, Shayne decided.

He slipped a punch off his forearm and then stepped inside, throwing short punches to the belly. The other man gasped and faltered in his own attack. Shayne doubled him up with a left, then straightened him up with a right. The tide of the fight had turned, and Shayne knew it.

So did his opponent. There was a beer bottle sitting on the bar, abandoned by its owner when the fight started. The man snatched it up, brandishing it in front of him. He backed off, smiling a crooked grin, and said, "Come on, sucker."

Shayne, completely in the grip of his Irish temper now, started forward. Tim Rourke grabbed his arm and said, "Wait, Mike! Look out for the bottle!"

Shayne's nostrils flared in his rage, but he stopped. The man with the bottle waved it and taunted, "Come on, big man! What's the matter, no guts?"

The door of the bar slammed open before Shayne could react. Chief Willie Jasper's voice boomed, "All right, everybody

hold it! What's going on here, Angie?"

Shayne looked over and saw Jasper and the two uniformed officers behind him. Jasper exclaimed, "Shayne! I should've known you and Rourke would be behind this."

"You've got it wrong, Chief," Rourke said. "That guy over there — Watch out, Mike!"

Shayne jerked his head around in time to see the beer bottle flying straight at his face. His nerves, made sharp by countless battles, took over and made him duck his head instantly.

The bottle clipped his temple and sent a shower of sparks past his eyes. He felt himself falling and found himself tangled in Rourke's legs. The bony reporter fell on top of him.

Angie was screaming again and Chief Jasper was shouting. The commotion made Shayne's head hurt. He shook it to clear some of the cobwebs, and suddenly he was being hauled to his feet by the two officers. When his vision cleared, he realized that the man who had picked the fight was nowhere to be seen.

Jasper's face was flushed as he barked, "Take 'em over and lock 'em up, Buster!"

The officer on Shayne's right, a thick-bodied man with dark beard stubble, grinned and drawled, "Sure, Chief."

"Wait a minute!" Tim Rourke protested. "What about the other

guy, the guy who started all this? Aren't you going after him?"

"Damn right I am," Jasper snapped. "I'd be locking him up right now, too, if he hadn't slipped out in the confusion. Do you know who he was, Angie?"

She shook her dark head. "I don't know his name, Chief, but he's been hanging around for the last few days."

Jasper set his bulldog jaw. "We'll get him."

Shayne knew the chief was lying.

It wouldn't have surprised the redhead a bit if he found out that the man who had started the fight was working with Jasper. This fight could have been staged, a deliberate set-up, a reaction from that hornet's nest he had stirred up.

"Are you going to hold us?" Shayne asked the chief.

"I sure am."

"On what charges?"

"Destruction of property, disturbing the peace, and public intoxication will do for starters. Take 'em along, Buster."

The officers kept their hold on Shayne and herded Rourke along in front of them. The reporter grumbled all the way to the police station, but Shayne kept silent. He had considered an escape attempt and then discarded the idea. Playing along for the moment might be the best way to find out what it was that was plaguing this sleepy little town.

One thing was for sure: There was a hell of a lot more to Joe Devon's death than a simple robbery-murder, and he was going to get to the bottom of it, even if it did mean going to jail!

IV

MIKE SHAYNE lay on his back on the hard, narrow bunk and sent a plume of cigarette smoke toward the ceiling. He was alone in the cell. Tim Rourke had assumed a similar position in the cell next to Shayne's. They were the only prisoners in the jail.

Night had fallen. The officer called Buster had brought them an unappetizing meal of cold hamburgers and soggy french fries. When Shayne had asked him about posting bond, he had just laughed and said, "You can ask the chief about it in the mornin'. I don't know nothin' about that kind of stuff."

There was only one light in the cell block area, and it was small and dim. The night was going to be a long one. Shayne wished he could spend some time alone with Chief Jasper. The man was frightened, that much was obvious, and he was covering something up. Shayne wanted to know the reasons why.

"This town is a mess, isn't it?" Rourke asked in the quietness of the cell block. "You wouldn't think so to look at it. Hell, if you blinked on your way through, you

might miss the whole town."

"The chief is scared to death," Shayne commented. "The more I think about it, the more it looks like he's working for someone else."

"Do you think Joe Devon found out something he shouldn't have?"

"It looks like it. There's a lot under the surface here, Tim, a lot more than you'd think just to look at the town." Shayne chuckled wryly. "I've got a feeling that we won't be getting back to Miami tomorrow. I hope Lucy is her usual sweet, understanding self."

Rourke grinned and was about to make a reply when the door separating the cell block from the rest of the building opened. Chief Willie Jasper stepped through it and came over to their cells. He stared at them lugubriously for a moment until Shayne said cynically, "Come to let us out, Jasper?"

"You'll get a bond hearing in the morning. Until then you stay put. I just came to ask you if you knew that fellow you were fighting with."

Shayne took a drag on his cigarette and replied, "I never saw him before he started the fight."

"Me either," Rourke put in.

"I've been asking around about him," Jasper said. "He showed up last week, said his name was Jake Donohue, and claimed he was looking for work. From what

everybody says, he hasn't been looking very hard."

"He's the one who should be locked up, not us," Rourke said.

"We'll get that all sorted out when we catch up to Donohue. We'll find him, I promise you that."

"I'll bet." Disbelief was evident in Rourke's voice.

Shayne was thinking. Jasper seemed a little less hostile right now. Shayne said, "Have you made any progress in Joe Devon's murder?"

Jasper looked weary. "We're still looking into it. I don't know why you two had to come clear across the state to roust around in a murder that doesn't concern you."

"It looks like you're the one that it doesn't concern. You don't seem to be too worried about finding the killer."

Jasper took an angry step toward Shayne, then stopped and settled for a glare. He snapped, "I do the best I can. That's all anybody can do."

Shayne exhaled smoke disdainfully. He seemed not to be paying much attention to Willie Jasper, but he was actually watching the chief closely out of the corner of his eye. The Miami detective's keen vision saw the emotions that played over the broad planes of Jasper's face.

Anger was first, but it was followed closely by fear and frustration. Jasper covered the signs

up well, but Shayne could tell that he was a man with some kind of a sword hanging over his head. The redhead began to wonder if he had misjudged the chief.

After a moment more of tense silence, Jasper left the cell block. When he was gone, Rourke said, "We'd better get hold of a lawyer tomorrow, Mike. That's one cop who'd like to see us rot here."

"I'm not so sure," Shayne said slowly. "There may be even more going on here than we thought there was." He dropped his cigarette butt on the concrete floor. "I think I'll try to get some sleep."

He dozed off before too long, and when he woke up, the single light in the cell block had been turned off. There were no windows in the cells, so the entire area was in pitch blackness.

Shayne could hear Rourke's even breathing and knew that the reporter was asleep. Now that he was awake, though, Shayne found it impossible to go back to sleep himself. He used the dark solitude to turn the events of the day over in his agile mind.

No formal charges had been filed against them. When morning came, either charges would be filed or they would be released. If charges were brought, Shayne would post bail. They would be out either way, and the investigation into Joe Devon's death could go on. So far, all the night in jail had provided was a little

more insight into the chief of police, but it might yet pay dividends.

The first thing Shayne wanted to do when they were released was to check out the place Angie had mentioned, the old Barrymore house. He didn't remember having ever heard of a famous bootlegger by that name, but he wasn't too familiar with the history of this part of the state. If Joe Devon had been working there, the old house might hold the key to his murder and to Chief Jasper's strange behavior.

Shayne was thinking along those lines when the door into the cell block opened, letting light spill into the area. A bulky silhouette stood there for a moment before ambling over to the cells. The light roused Rourke, and he mumbled a sleepy, "Who's there?"

"Howdy, boys," the figure said. "It's just me. Officer Copeland. But you can call me Buster."

Shayne felt his hackles rising. Copeland's easy familiarity didn't fool him. He knew that there was something very wrong with this situation, and he wondered where Chief Jasper was.

"What do you want?" Shayne growled. "We are trying to sleep."

Copeland jangled a ring of keys. "I've got something for Mr. Rourke here." He unlocked the door to Tim's cell and swung it open.

Rourke stood up, rubbing his eyes and yawning. "What is it?" he asked.

Copeland stepped into Rourke's cell. "This."

Too late, Shayne saw the cruel grin on his face and the billy club in his hands. Before he could even shout a warning, Copeland had driven the hardwood club into Rourke's belly with stunning force.

Rourke gave a short, strangled cry and began to fold up. Copeland grabbed him so that he wouldn't fall and hit him in the side.

With an incoherent shout of rage, Shayne flung himself at the bars separating the cells. He thrust an arm through them, but Copeland and Rourke were out of reach.

The officer saw Shayne's reaching arm and snapped, "Get your paws back in your own cage!" He cracked the club across Shayne's knuckles.

Shayne jerked his throbbing hand back and shouted, "Damn you!"

Copeland had turned back to Rourke. Between gritted teeth, he said, "I'm here to teach you a lesson, city boy. We don't want no Miami hotshots messin' in our business around here!"

While Shayne watched, seething, Buster Copeland worked the lanky reporter over with both club and fist. Rourke was too stunned to fight back. Shayne

growled in fury and frustration as Rourke was reduced to a bloodied, whimpering creature who crawled on the floor at Copeland's feet. The officer gave him a final kick in the side and then turned to Shayne.

"You let that be a lesson, Shayne," he said, catching his breath. "You and your buddy there may be hell on wheels in Miami, but you ain't worth dog droppings here!"

When he spoke, Shayne's voice was an icy calm and as deadly as it had ever been. "I promise you, Copeland, that when I get out of here, I'm going to give you twice as much as you gave to Rourke."

Copeland laughed, and his hand moved. Shayne found himself staring down the .45 caliber barrel of Copeland's revolver. The brutal officer said, "Maybe I'd better make sure you can't get out. You ever think about that, Shayne? I could drop you where you stand and then toss Rourke in there with you. If I told everybody the two of you got to fightin' and I had to shoot you to save Rourke's life —"

"Nobody would be dumb enough to believe it," Shayne cut in. He watched Copeland's face closely, hoping that his bravado wouldn't backfire on him. "You're nothing but a goddamn bully. Did the chief send you in here to rough us up and throw a scare into us?"

Copeland's face had lost a little

of its self-assurance but none of its menace. He grated, "It don't matter who sent me in here. All that matters is that you wise up and get the hell out of Port McCall as soon as you get the chance."

Shayne pointed at Rourke's limp form. "He's in no shape to travel."

Copeland leered. "We'll take care of him. We got a hospital in this town, you know."

Shayne broke into a grin no less menacing than Copeland's and said, "I'm afraid your plan backfired, Buster. I'm not leaving town until Rourke is able to leave with me, so I guess you'll have me around for a while."

Copeland glowered and holstered his gun. He said, "We'll just see about that, Shayne," and went out, slamming both doors behind him and leaving the cells in darkness again.

There was a cigarette lighter in Shayne's pocket. They had left him that when they searched him, even though they had taken his wallet and gun. Now he dug the lighter out and flicked it on. The wavering illumination that it cast was enough for him to see Rourke's crumpled body on the floor. He was lying very still now, and there was blood on his head.

Shayne set the lighter down for a while, and then knelt beside the bars. When he reached through them and stretched as far as he could, he could barely reach Rourke's outflung wrist. It was a

bad moment for Shayne as he felt around trying to find a pulse. When he finally located it, it was rapid but weak. Rourke was alive, but he was in shock.

"Tim!" Shayne said urgently. "Tim, wake up!" It was important to get through to Rourke, to keep him from slipping any closer to death. Shayne raised his booming voice even more and kept calling his friend's name.

After about a minute, Rourke moaned weakly and moved his head slightly. Shayne commanded, "Tim, wake up! Wake up!"

"M-Mike? Wha' happened? Head ... hurts ... "

Rourke needed medical attention as soon as possible, or he might die in this dingy little cell. Shayne used all the lungpower he had to yell, "Hey! Help! Help in here!"

Time dragged by nightmarishly. After what seemed like days but in reality must have been less than a half-hour, the door opened and Chief Jasper said, "My God, what's going on in here?"

Shayne surged to his feet and snapped, "Call a doctor and an ambulance — fast!"

Jasper turned the light on. His eyes widened and his face paled at the sight of Rourke lying on the floor, but he covered the reaction up as quickly as he could. In a flat voice that precluded any argument, he said, "Officer Copeland called me and told me that Rourke

had fallen down and hurt himself. I've already called an ambulance."

For the moment, Shayne didn't give a damn what kind of cock-and-bull story Copeland had told. Rourke's life was hanging in the balance now, and the settling up could wait until later.

But when the time came ... Shayne's big rough fists clenched involuntarily as he thought about facing Buster Copeland on equal terms.

The ambulance arrived a few minutes later. A stretcher was brought into the cell block. As the attendants lifted Rourke onto it, Shayne said; "Be careful with him."

"We know our business, okay, buddy?"

As they carried Rourke out, Chief Jasper said, "I'll be over to the hospital later. Take good care of him."

At those words, reminiscent of some spoken earlier by Copeland, Shayne felt a pang of fear for Rourke. He suddenly wished he was going along in the ambulance.

Before he left, Jasper said, "Don't worry about your friend, Shayne. I'm sure he'll be all right."

"I wish I was so sure, Jasper. All I know is that he'd better be."

Jasper gave him a long, hard, considering look and then went out, turning off the light and shutting the door behind him. Shayne was in the dark again.

It was an uncomfortable feeling.

V

THE REST OF THE NIGHT passed slowly for Shayne. He tried not to think about the way Rourke had looked when the ambulance attendants carried him out, but the images kept coming back, unbidden, to the redhead's mind.

There were too many unanswered questions about this whole mess. Chief Jasper's behavior was the puzzle that most troubled Shayne. The chief had seemed openly hostile at times, and yet reluctantly sympathetic at others. Still, he had allowed Cope land's beating of Rourke to pass without comment, even though it was obvious he knew what had really happened. For the time being, anyway, Shayne had no choice but to consider him an enemy.

Then there was Jake Donohue, who seemed to be playing the role of mysterious stranger. The fight at Angie's had been staged to give Jasper an excuse to toss them into jail, Shayne was sure of that. There would be some settling of scores with Donohue, too.

Shayne dozed again briefly before morning, but he was wide awake when Chief Jasper came in and unlocked the cell door. The chief swung it open and said, "All right, Shayne, you can get out of here."

"What happened to the charges

against me?"

"Angie's not going to press any charges. You're a lucky man, Shayne. If you're smart, you'll head on back to Miami."

Shayne stood and stretched his rangy form, trying to straighten out the kinks that the hard bunk had put into it. He growled, "What about Rourke?"

"He'll be all right. We've got him in the Port McCall hospital. The doctor says he's got a pretty severe concussion but no internal injuries. Should be okay in a week or so."

Shayne stepped out of the cell. "Do you really expect me to leave him here?"

"Nothing's going to happen to him. He's in the hospital."

"Something happened to him in jail."

Jasper scowled. "I've told you what you'd better do. I can't do anymore than that."

"Should I take that as a warning?"

"Take it anyway you damn well please," the chief snapped. He turned to walk out of the cell block, saying, "Come on, I've got your stuff outside."

Shayne followed him out into the office area. His gun, wallet, and keys were on Jasper's desk. The chief sat down and shoved a form at him. "Sign this receipt for your property."

Shayne checked the items over and then scrawled his signature on the paper. As he picked up his

things, something else on the desk caught his eye. It was a photograph, partially obscured by a folder lying on top of it.

Before Jasper could protest, Shayne had picked up the picture and scanned it, imprinting it on his brain. It was a medium-close shot of a man lying on his side. Shayne could see a dark stain on his back. It was obvious that the man was dead.

"Joe Devon?" Shayne guessed.

Jasper came to his feet. "Give me that," he said, confirming Shayne's assumption.

Shayne moved the photo just out of Jasper's reach, using the second that gave him to study Joe Devon's face in death. It had been twisted toward the camera, showing a broad-faced balding man. He wore a white shirt with dark smudges on the collar and throat.

"I told you to give me that," Jasper grated. Shayne handed the picture over, satisfied with what he had seen. The chief continued, "Are you leaving town or not?"

"You'll be the first to know if I do," Shayne said.

He walked out of the police station into a muggy morning with a bright, clear sky overhead. As he strode down the street, he decided that the first thing he should do was check with the hospital about Tim Rourke's condition.

He didn't get the chance, however. A car pulled up at the curb

beside him, and a woman's voice said, "Mr. Shayne? You *are* Mike Shayne?"

Shayne stopped and looked over. The woman was sitting on the passenger side, looking out the open window at him. She had short blonde hair and a face that was still very attractive despite her age, which Shayne placed in the early forties. A man was driving, but Shayne couldn't tell much about him.

"I'm Mike Shayne," the redhead admitted.

"Could you get in, please? I have to talk to you. It's about Joe ... Joe Devon."

Getting into a car with two strangers in an unfriendly town was not Shayne's idea of a smart thing to do. But he had always been one to play a hunch when the mood struck him, and it struck him now. He opened the rear door and got in.

The woman turned in the seat to look at him and said, "You don't know me, Mr. Shayne, but my name is Velma McBride. This is my brother Luther. I — I was a friend of Joe Devon's, a good friend."

She paused, but Shayne didn't say anything, preferring that she tell her story at her own pace. After a moment, she went on, "There's talk around town that you're going to try to find Joe's killer. Is that true?"

"What if it is?"

"Then I want to help you in any

way that I can. Joe and I ... we were going to be married."

That was news to Shayne. Yet it stood to reason that Devon would have had female companions. The detective from Miami said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know about that. Had you set a date?"

"No, not yet. Joe was working on something that he said would get him back in the newspaper game. He had been working on it for months, and we were waiting until he was finished."

That could very well be connected with Devon's phone call to Rourke. Shayne asked, "Do you know what it was he was working on?"

"No, he was keeping it a secret. Do you think it might be important?"

"It could be. Do you think you could try to find out for me? Devon probably had some files or notes somewhere, if he was like most reporters."

"All right. I — I've got a key to his apartment. I'll look around."

Shayne thought he detected a slight blush on Velma McBride's face. It probably embarrassed her to admit in front of a stranger and her own brother that she had a key to Devon's apartment.

At that thought, Shayne took his first good look at Luther McBride. He was younger than his sister, with dark hair and a calm, almost vacant face. He was probably none too bright, from the look of him.

As Shayne got out of the car, he saw that Luther wore an oil-stained shirt with his name stitched on the pocket. "You work at a gas station, Luther?" Shayne asked.

McBride nodded his head. "Yes, sir, right over there." He pointed at the station where Joe Devon had been killed. His face paled as he said, "I — I was the one who found Mr. Devon yesterday morning."

His sister patted his shoulder and said, "It was a terrible shock for both of us."

Shayne leaned in the window of the car and said, "Don't worry. I've got a personal stake in this case, too, and I'm going to stick around until I get things cleared up. How can I get in touch with you?"

Velma gave him her address and telephone number, and then Shayne said, "I'll be in touch. See what you can find in Devon's apartment and I'll drop in or give you a call later. By the way, do you know where I can find the old Barrymore place?"

"Of course," Velma replied. "It's about two miles south of town on the highway, right on the waterfront. It's the biggest house around; you can't miss it. Why do you ask?"

"Did you know that Joe Devon was working out there the day he was killed?"

"No, I didn't see Joe at all that day. I didn't know someone had

moved in out there."

"I don't know what the connection is, if there is one, but I'm going out there to check the place over a little later." The big redhead stepped away from the car. "I'll be seeing you." He nodded to Velma and Luther and started walking down the street again.

His Buick was still parked in the lot next to *Angie's Bar and Grill*. Although a sign in the window of the building said that it was closed, there was another car in the lot and the front door was slightly ajar. Shayne changed course and pushed the door open, stepping into the dim interior of the bar.

Angie was sitting in a booth at the far end of the room, a ledger open in front of her. She looked up at his entrance and said, "Oh — Mr. Shayne!"

Shayne grinned. "All right if I come in? I'll try not to bust up the joint this time."

"That wasn't your fault. Donohue was determined to pick a fight."

"I appreciate you seeing it that way and not pressing charges. Mind if I sit down?"

Angie smiled and said, "Of course not. Where's your friend?"

Shayne couldn't stop his face from going grim. "In the hospital. He had a so-called accident."

Angie's face tightened and she frowned. "Not a run-in with Buster Copeland, I hope."

"Yeah. How did you know?"

"Your friend isn't the first prisoner that Buster has roughed up. I hope he isn't hurt too bad."

"Bad enough. He'll recover, but he'll be in the hospital for a while. How does Copeland get away with garbage like that?"

"Chief Jasper's wife is his cousin."

Shayne nodded in understanding. He got out a cigarette and lit it, considering while he did so. Angie seemed to be sympathetic and obviously knew most of what went on in town. She might prove to be a valuable source of information.

A sudden hunger pang reminded him that he hadn't eaten since the awful meal in jail the night before. He said, "Can I buy you some breakfast?"

Angie smiled again. Shayne liked the way it made her look. She said, "No need. I've got coffee and Danish in the back room. Care to join me?"

He was glad to, and said as much. Angie brought the food out, and when they had made a good start on it, Shayne asked, "How well did you know Joe Devon?"

"Not as well as I would have liked to. He was a good man, the kind of man a girl could have had a nice, uncomplicated romance with."

"Did you?" Shayne asked.

"I wouldn't have minded, but ... No, I didn't. I went out with him a few times, after he had kind of gotten over his wife's death, but

then he met Velma McBride."

"Shayne took a sip of the coffee. "I talked to the McBride woman a little while ago. She said that she and Devon had planned to get married as soon as he finished some secret project he was working on. Do you know anything about that?"

"Not about any secret project. I had heard that they were talking marriage, which didn't surprise me. Didn't make me too happy, either."

Shayne studied her face intently for a moment. There was a hint of jealousy in her voice, and the green-eyed monster had motivated more than one murder. The old cliche about a woman scorned had a grain of truth to it. And Shayne knew that when it came to murder, even far-fetched possibilities had to be considered.

He swallowed the last bite of his Danish and washed it down with the rest of the coffee. Standing up, he said, "Thanks for the breakfast. Can I pay you for it?"

Angie shook her head. "Forget it. Mornings are dull. You made this one a little less so."

He put a hundred dollar bill on the table. "For the damages last night."

"Oh, no —"

"I insist."

"But it was Donohue's fault."

Shayne grinned and rubbed his rugged jaw. "Let's just say he can reimburse me when I catch up to him. In spades."

VI

LESS THAN a half-hour later, Shayne was heading south out of Port McCall, his destination the old Barrymore place.

He had found the hospital easily, nothing being too hard to find in a town the size of Port McCall, but he had not been permitted to see Tim Rourke. The doctor had imposed a strict no-visitors policy for at least forty-eight hours. A granite-faced nurse had assured him, however, that Rourke was in stable condition and beginning to show signs of improvement.

The highway curved over close to the shoreline as it made its way out of town. The surface of the Gulf was flat and glassy this morning. The sun broke off of it in a blinding glare.

After a couple of miles, the road turned back away from the water slightly. Shayne saw a small slough up ahead, and beside it on a knoll was a huge old frame house. A driveway a couple of hundred yards long turned off the highway and led up to it.

Shayne cruised on past, studying the layout. There were several cars parked at the house, telling him that it was definitely occupied. A few trees dotted the lawn here and there, but mostly open ground surrounded the house. It would be hard to approach and easy to defend.

It looked like a night-time

excursion was going to be in order.

Shayne went a quarter of a mile past the house and then turned the car around on the lightly traveled highway. He had the windows on both sides rolled down, trying to catch any vagrant cool breezes. He was halfway back to town when he heard a sound he had heard many times before —

The violent, flat *whap* of a bullet cutting the air beside his ear.

No glass shattered. The slug had passed through both open windows. Shayne jammed his foot down on the brake pedal.

The Buick rocked to a stop. Shayne had no way of knowing what direction the shot had come from. He would be a sitting duck if he sat still, so he hit the gas again. Hopefully, the sudden stop had thrown the gunman's aim off.

Shayne eased off on the accelerator when the speedometer needle touched ninety. As far as he could tell, there had been no more shots, and he was entering the outskirts of Port McCall again.

He slowed the car down to a normal rate of speed. There wasn't much he could do right now. He would have to wait for nightfall to pay another visit to the Barrymore house, and Velma McBride probably hadn't had time to investigate Joe Devon's secret project.

The best thing for him to do right now might be to find a place

to stay. That was a matter that hadn't come up the night before, since he and Rourke had had their accommodations provided by the city.

There was only one motel in Port McCall. It was at the north end of town. Shayne pulled up to it and rented a room, paying for a week in advance. He wasn't going to be leaving this town until Tim Rourke could go with him.

He had no luggage, since he hadn't planned on staying, so unpacking was no problem. There were water glasses in the room and an ice machine by the office, and a little liquor store across the street provided a fifth of Martell. Shayne went back to the room, poured himself a drink, and picked up the phone.

Lucy was at the office, as he had expected her to be. Her voice was a trifle sharp as she said, "Michael, why didn't you call sooner? I was worried about you."

"Sorry, Angel. There weren't any phones where we spent the night."

"Where's that?"

"The Port McCall city jail."

He listened to her exclamation and then explained the situation to her, his voice growing cold and grim as he told her what had happened to Rourke.

"Is there anything I can do to help, Michael?"

"Just keep us in your thoughts, Angel. We'll be back when this

mess is cleared up and Tim is better."

"Michael ... be careful."

"Always, Angel," he said, even though she knew better.

Next, he put in a call to Carl Dirkson, Rourke's city editor at the Miami *Daily News*. When Dirkson came on the line, his shock and disbelief echoed Lucy's as Shayne told him what had happened to Rourke. Like Lucy, he said, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"See if you can get me some information about a bootlegger named Barrymore who supposedly built a house here in the Twenties. It would have been a big fancy place at that time, even though it's just an old house now."

"Sure thing, Mike," Dirkson said. "Tim told me about Joe Devon's murder. Is all this connected?"

"It sure as hell could be. I just haven't fitted all the pieces together yet."

"You will, Mike. You always have. Will you be getting back to me about this Barrymore?"

"Yeah, I'll call you later this afternoon. And thanks for the vote of confidence, Carl."

Shayne hung up and settled back on the bed to smoke a cigarette and sip his drink. He would give Velma McBride a little more time and then see if she had found out anything.

He had been lying there for only a few moments when a knock

came on the door. Shayne frowned, then swung his long legs off the bed and stood up. As far as he knew, no one was aware that he was here. Unless, of course, the desk clerk had recognized him and phoned someone with the news.

Or unless whoever had taken a shot at him earlier had followed him here ...

Shayne slipped his pistol out of its holster as he approached the door. He called out, "Who is it?"

"It's Harry from the desk, sir. I just noticed that you've got a flat on your car."

Shayne cursed under his breath, put up his gun, and opened the door. Changing a tire in this humid weather would not be a pleasant task. He started to step out and stopped short.

Jake Donohue locked eyes with him over the barrel of a gun.

Shayne cursed out loud this time.

The nervous desk clerk was standing to one side. Donohue said to him, "You did good, Harry. Now if you're smart, you'll run back to the office and pretend this never happened."

"R-right, Mr. Donohue." Harry left in a hurry.

"All right, Shayne," Donohue said. "Just back up slow. And don't get excited. All I want is talk."

Shayne felt stupid, and he didn't like the feeling. He backed up toward the bed, glaring all the way. Donohue closed the door as

he came into the room.

"You know your trouble, Shayne?" he said conversationally. "You're too thick-headed. You can't take a hint. Everybody wants you to leave town, so what do you do? You stay."

"Is that all you came to say?"

"Nope." Donohue looked solemn. "I wanted to tell you that I'm sorry your friend got hurt. I didn't mean for that to happen."

"I'll bet." Shayne's voice was bitter.

"Listen, I don't give a damn if you believe me or not. But the best thing for you to do is go back where you came from. I won't be responsible for your skin if you don't."

Shayne's smoldering temper flared. "Cut this crap out, Donohue! You're here because you missed earlier. Why don't you go ahead and get it over with? You've got me where you want me!"

Donohue looked genuinely puzzled at Shayne's words. He said, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about, Shayne, but consider this a fair warning. Get out of Port McCall and go back to Miami."

Shayne had been gauging the distance between them. As Donohue started backing up toward the door, Shayne's hand swooped down and snatched up a heavy glass ashtray on the bedside table. With a snap of a wrist, he flung it at Donohue's head and

followed it in a dive.

Surprisingly, Donohue didn't shoot. He sprang to one side, dodging both the ashtray and Shayne's hurtling form. His arm came around in a short arc. The pistol thudded into Shayne's head, sending a jolt of pain through his brain.

Shayne slumped dizzily to the floor, expecting the smash of a bullet into his body. It had been a grandstand play, and such maneuvers either succeeded or failed spectacularly.

No shot came. Shayne shook his head groggily as he heard the door slam. By the time he made it to his feet, Donohue was gone, and there was no sign of him in the parking lot of the motel. Shayne walked outside and looked around to no avail.

He went back into the cabin and picked up his drink. A healthy swallow went a long way toward clearing out the cobwebs. Donohue's visit had muddied the waters even more and left Shayne with more questions to ponder.

Why hadn't Donohue shot him? It had been the perfect opportunity. Could he have been wrong about Donohue? It was just possible that the big man was not working with Chief Jasper and that the chief had not staged the fight in Angie's, but how likely was it? One thing was sure — Donohue wanted him out of town, just like Jasper and Buster Copeland.

And whoever had shot at him on the highway.

VII

SHAYNE DIDN'T INTEND TO sleep, but the activities of the past few days were catching up to him. The cognac had an effect on him, too, and before he knew it, he was stretched out on the motel bed, snoring heartily.

When he awoke, the sun was low in the west, slanting red rays over the Gulf. Other than a slight headache, Shayne felt rested and refreshed. He was hungry, having slept through lunch, but supper would have to wait until after he had made some phone calls.

The first one was to the hospital to check on Rourke. A nurse told him that the reporter's condition had been upgraded from fair to good. The no-visitors policy has not been changed, however.

Shayne thanked her and hung up. His next call was a long-distance one to Miami. An unfamiliar voice in the office placed it for him, and Shayne asked, "What happened to Harry?"

"He went home sick just before lunch."

Shayne smiled wryly.

When he got through to Dirkson, he said, "This is Shayne, Carl. Do you have that information for me?"

"You bet, Mike. This Barrymore was quite a character. He was an Englishman by birth, and

he had the biggest boot-legging operation on the west coast of Florida during Prohibition. He had a lot of influential friends in the state capital who kept the Feds off his back."

"How about the house near Port McCall?"

"That was his base of operations. He had his distillery and warehouse in the basement, and a tunnel connected it with the shore. That was to make loading the stuff on boats easier."

Shayne tugged at his earlobe. That was a potentially valuable item of information. He said, "What happened to Barrymore?"

"He evidently sampled too much of his own product. Died of a rotten liver in 1937. Speaking of which, how's Tim?"

"Improving, they say. I still haven't gotten in to see him."

"Give him my regards when you do."

"Will do, Carl. Thanks."

Shayne cradled the receiver and fired up a cigarette. He found Velma McBride's phone number in his notebook and dialed it.

After listening to twenty futile rings, Shayne hung up. A frown drew his shaggy red brows together. It might not have been a good idea to send her to Joe Devon's apartment. The situation was confused and that only made things more dangerous.

Velma's brother might know where she was. Shayne slipped his coat on, settled his hat on his

head, and left the cabin, locking the door behind him.

Shayne hoped that Luther was at the service station. If he was, two birds could be killed with one stone. Shayne could check with him about Velma and also get the Buick filled up. The needle on the gas gauge was hovering just above *Empty*.

Shayne wheeled the car into the station a few minutes later. Luther came out of the attached garage, wiping grease off his hands with a rag. He gave the detective a smile and said, "Howdy, Mr. Shayne. Can I help you?"

"I hope so, Luther." Shayne got out of the car. "You can fill the tank for me for starters."

Luther got the gas pump going, and then Shayne said, "Have you seen your sister in the last few hours?"

"Oh, yeah, I was supposed to tell you. Velma's looking for you. She came by here just a little while ago and said she hadn't been able to find you around town."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"Afraid not, Mr. Shayne." Luther topped off the tank and said, "I'm glad you're trying to help Velma. She's always been real good to me, Mr. Shayne. She raised me after our folks died, you know."

Shayne paid for the gas and said, "Will you be seeing Velma later?"

Luther nodded. "Yeah, at

home. I still live with her, and it looks like I'll get to keep on, now that poor Mr. Devon's gone."

"When you see her again, tell her I'll come by your house later on tonight."

"Okay, Mr. Shayne, I'll be glad to."

Shayne's stomach was demanding some attention. *Angie's Bar and Grill* seemed to be as good a place to eat as any in town, and if the proprietor was there, the company would be pleasant.

The place was a lot more crowded than it had been when Shayne was there that morning, but he was able to grab a booth. Angie was behind the bar. She gave Shayne a smile and a wave when he came in.

She came over to the booth a few minutes later and said, "Hi. What have you been up to since this morning? Caught up with Donohue yet?"

"As a matter of fact," Shayne said ruefully, "he caught up with me."

"What do you mean by that?"

Shayne gave her a fast rundown on what had happened since he saw her last and finished up by saying, "So I guess I really don't have much to show for today. At least not yet."

Angie sat down across the table from him and pushed a strand of dark hair away from her forehead. Her expression was serious as she said, "If you don't mind my asking, what is it with you, Mike?"

know you're upset because your friend got hurt, but you strike me as some kind of, I don't know, white knight who comes crusading in here to clean up the town. Why, Mike?"

Shayne had to grin at her choice of words. He said, "I've been called a lot of things before, but never a white knight. And that's not what I am, Angie. I'm just a guy who sticks by his friends and doesn't like to be pushed around. I'm no different from anybody else."

"I think you are, Mike," she said softly. "I think you're very different."

There was no mistaking the spark that passed between them. Given time, he thought, it could be fanned into quite a flame. But time was something he didn't have right now.

Shayne let a moment of silence go by and then said, "I could sure use some supper."

"Of course." Angie made her voice brisk and businesslike. "What would you like?"

"Whatever you've got that's good."

For a second, Angie looked like she wanted to make some comment about that, but then she said, "I'll see what I can dig up."

What she dug up was a thick steak and a mound of home fries. Shayne dug in with gusto, feeling the good food begin to replenish his strength.

When the meal was finished, he

stood up and stretched, feeling better than he had in days. He left enough money on the table to cover the bill and a sizable tip besides, said a friendly goodbye to Angie, and went out to his car.

The sun had finished sinking below the horizon while he was eating, and full night had fallen, bringing a slight relief from the day's heat. Mosquitoes buzzed around Shayne's head as he got into the Buick.

It was dark enough now to pay a return visit to old Eustace Barrymore's mansion. Shayne hoped he could approach the house unseen and possibly discover who was living there. The identity of the tenants could very well be the reason Joe Devon was killed.

It didn't take Shayne long to reach the little slough and its overlooking knoll. He drove on past the driveway without slowing down, but his keen eyes noted the lights on both floors of the house. When he had gone around a bend in the road and out of sight, he pulled the Buick over onto the highway's broad shoulder and cut the lights and engine.

He closed the door quietly after he had gotten out. Sound could carry a long way in this still night air.

He had checked his gun before leaving the car. The hammer rested on an empty chamber, but the rest of the cylinder was full, and there were extra rounds in his pocket.

It was a quarter of a mile back to the driveway. Shayne covered it rapidly with long strides. No traffic came along as he walked along the road, and he hoped it stayed that way.

Once he got to the driveway, Shayne went down it a short way, stepping carefully to avoid loose gravel, and then cut across the lawn. The night was quiet, and he could hear the water lapping gently in the slough.

Music came from inside the house, and quite a few lights were on. While it was a long way from being a party, Shayne could tell that the house's occupants were awake and probably alert. He stayed behind the cover of trees and shrubs as much as he could in his approach.

The cover began to get sparser as he got closer to the house, however. He finally had to simply duck his head and sprint across open ground until he was in the shadows of the house.

He was at the side of the house, and there was an open window only a few yards away. As he edged closer to it, he could overhear two men talking inside.

"Jeez, ain't it hot tonight. I wish the boss had this place air-conditioned before he moved in."

"Yeah, but you know the boss. He don't want to attract any more attention than he has to."

"He could of at least put some damn window units in!"

Shayne had heard accents like

that before. He would have been willing to bet that both of them had yellow sheets as long as his arm. He wondered who the boss was that they were referring to.

Another window further along toward the front of the house, one with open curtains, beckoned him. He crept over to it silently. This one was lower. Shayne took his hat off and edged his head upwards.

He was looking into a living room that had probably once been sumptuous. Now it was sparsely furnished and had an incomplete look to it. But it did have one occupant, a man sitting in an arm-chair, listening to a radio and sipping a drink, with his profile toward Shayne.

The redhead detective knew automatically that he was looking at the boss. He could see the arrogance and self-assurance in the jut of the man's rigid chin. Those hooded eyes would be cold and piercing when the man gave a command. And there was no doubt that the command would be carried out.

Shayne had never seen him before, but he would recognize him again in an instant. If this man did not want his presence here known, he might have ordered Joe Devon's death without a moment's hesitation. Shayne suddenly wondered if Devon's secret project had anything to do with organized crime.

What Shayne needed to do now was to get in touch with Will

Gentry back in Miami and see if the burly Chief of Police could put a name with Shayne's description of the man in the house. Also, he still had to get in touch with Velma McBride.

Moving with a grace rarely seen in a man of his size, Shayne glided away from the house and out onto the lawn. As he made his way back toward the highway, the unanswered questions popped up again in his mind.

Assuming that the man in the house had been responsible for Devon's death, how did Chief Jasper and Jake Donohue fit in? What reasons were behind their inconsistent actions? And was it possible, though unlikely, that Devon's death was not even connected with this house built by an old-fashioned bootlegger? If such was the case, where did that leave Shayne?

As he turned the questions over in his mind, an uneasy feeling suddenly struck him. It was a feeling that he had experienced before at times, a vague impression that he was overlooking something. That he had seen something somewhere that was important and had failed to grasp the significance of it. As always, it was a damned frustrating feeling.

It almost caused him to miss the sound that saved his life:

It was just a simple swish of air as he passed a tree. Shayne sensed it behind him and threw himself to one side. The knife that

had been meant for his back sliced through empty air.

Shayne whirled while his attacker was off balance and lashed out with a big, knobby fist. It connected, and his opponent staggered back against the tree.

Shayne came in quickly, hoping to press his advantage with blows to the body, but the man recovered faster than he had any right to, slashing with the knife and making Shayne leap backwards to avoid it.

Pulling his gun and dropping the man was out. That would alert the house. All Shayne could do was try to avoid the knife and watch for an opening of his own.

It was an eerie moment, there in the starlight, as Shayne desperately dodged the knife thrusts. After a few seconds, he realized what the other man's silence meant. He hadn't called for help, so he must have been a stranger here, too, unwilling to rouse those in the house.

The man was good, very good. Shayne knew he was taking a chance when he waited a fraction of a second too long to dodge one thrust of the knife. The blade scraped along his side, tearing both clothes and hide, but when he clamped his arm down, the man's forearm was trapped momentarily, and Shayne put everything he had into a punch with his other hand.

Fist met jaw with a clean crack, and the man slumped against Shayne, knife slipping from his

fingers. Shayne hoisted the suddenly limp weight onto his shoulders and headed back for the Buick as quick as he could.

He dumped the unconscious man in the back seat and quickly studied his face under the dome light. He was nobody that Shayne had ever seen before. Sleek dark hair topped a face that was lean and cruel. Shayne went through his pockets rapidly and turned up nothing but a little foreign-made pistol and nearly two thousand dollars in cash.

Shayne said, "Dammit!" If things got much more complicated...

He wondered how Jasper would react when he brought this little prize in and dumped it on the chief's desk.

VIII

SHAYNE WAS HALFWAY back to Port McCall when things went haywire again.

He fully expected the man in the back seat to remain unconscious for a good long while, so it was a complete surprise when an arm looped itself around his neck and jerked back.

Shayne gasped. The attack had come at the end of an exhalation, when his lungs were empty of oxygen. He struggled to keep his hands on the wheel as the arm tightened on his throat.

He hit the brakes, slowing the Buick, and drove an elbow back

over the seat. It landed with bone-jarring impact. The arm around his throat loosened its grip.

Shayne tore away from the man's groping hands and brought the Buick to a slewing stop on the shoulder of the highway. He rolled across the seat, flung the passenger door open, and dropped out of the car. The interior of the Buick was too cramped for a fight.

As he came to his feet, Shayne slapped at his shoulder holster. The stunning realization that it was empty came at the same time as a blast from inside the car. Lead whined past Shayne's ear like the mosquitoes had earlier.

He dove down the embankment next to the road as his captive fired again. His gun must have fallen out of its holster during the brief struggle in the car, and his opponent had wasted no time in finding it.

The lip of a culvert stuck out at the bottom of the embankment. Shayne crouched behind it. It didn't afford much cover, but it was better than nothing.

Earlier, he had slipped the man's little foreign automatic into his pocket. Now the redhead pulled it out, and in the faint light from the stars, checked the clip. It was full.

A slug from above chipped concrete off the culvert. Shayne snapped off two shots in return and used their cover to slip into the mouth of the culvert.

He had to make it through in a

hurry. It wouldn't take the man long to figure out where he had gone, and while he was in the culvert, Shayne would be a sitting duck.

The bottom of the culvert was several inches deep in water and mud, and the top of the concrete cylinder scraped Shayne's shoulders and back as he scuttled through it. He hoped that he didn't put a hand down on a snake in the pitch blackness.

It seemed to take forever to reach the circle of faint light that marked the other end, but Shayne knew it was only a matter of seconds. He came out of the culvert and went up the embankment on the opposite side of the road as quietly as he could.

The man was crouched beside the Buick with his back to Shayne. Gravel grated under the redhead's feet as he stepped onto the shoulder. The man spun and triggered a snap shot without aiming.

The slug burned past Shayne. He fired twice before the other man could pull the trigger again.

The shots knocked the man back against the Buick. Shayne's gun slipped from the man's fingers and he crumpled slowly to the road.

Shayne kept the sights of the little automatic on him as he approached. The fallen man didn't move, and after a moment, Shayne knelt and checked for a pulse. He heaved a long sigh when he didn't find one.

He had wanted answers to some questions from this man. He wouldn't be getting any now.

A flashing red light suddenly threw its glare on the scene. Shayne stood up as a police car raced along the highway toward him. Someone in town must have heard the shooting. The cruiser skidded to a stop and doors popped open.

"Freeze, Shayne!" a voice yelled, and it was all the redhead could do not to groan. He scowled into the glow of a spotlight and muttered curses. Officer Buster Copeland was one of the last people he wanted to see right now.

"All right, Shayne, drop the gun!" Copeland commanded. Shayne did as he was told, and then the officer's bulky figure came swaggering out from behind the light. He chuckled and said, "Whoo-ee! It looks like you killed a man this time, hotshot. We'll just see how you like a murder charge!"

IX

MIKE SHAYNE was back in jail for the second night in a row. It looked like he wouldn't need his hotel room.

Copeland and another officer had brought him in, along with the dead man, and Shayne had been placed in the same cell as before. They hadn't even left him his cigarettes this time, and there was nothing for him to do except sit on

the bunk and fume at the turn events had taken.

Chief Willie Jasper opened the cell door and stepped inside. His face was a mixture of anger and regret as he looked at Shayne. He shook his head and said, "You just couldn't do the smart thing, could you, Shayne?"

"I was never one to run away from trouble," Shayne replied tightly.

"So you make more trouble for everybody. Why did you have to go and kill somebody?"

"It was self-defense."

"That'll be up to the grand jury to decide. Anyway, I don't guess it'll hurt for you to have some company." Jasper stood aside and motioned to someone outside the door.

Velma McBride stepped into the cell block, looking pale and nervous and carrying a large purse. She said, "Hello, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne stood up. "Hello, Miss McBride. As you can see, I haven't gotten very far toward solving Joe's murder."

Jasper muttered, "Hell, that's not your job. It's mine."

Velma turned to him and said, "Could we be alone for a few minutes, Chief?"

"All right," Jasper growled grudgingly. "Three minutes. But I hate to see a lady like you mixed up with somebody like Shayne, Velma." He went out, shutting the door behind him.

Velma hurried over to the cell.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, except for being muddy and locked up. Did you see Luther?"

"Yes, why?"

"He told you I'd be around to see you later, didn't he?"

"No, he didn't mention talking to you. I've been looking for you all day, Mr. Shayne. I suppose I should have stayed home and waited for you to call; but I was so worried about what I found in Joe's apartment."

"What is it?"

She opened the purse and took out an envelope stuffed with papers. Slipping it through the bars to Shayne, she said, "As far as I can tell, these are the notes for a series of articles that Joe was writing. According to him, they were going to be his ticket back to the newspaper business."

Shayne scanned the contents of the envelope quickly. There were quite a few pages of typed notes, some newspaper clippings and documents, and some photographs. He gave a low whistle and tugged worriedly on his earlobe. "Did Jasper check your purse before you came in here?"

"No." Velma gave a slight smile. "He's known me for years, and I suppose he thinks I'm not the type to smuggle anything in to a prisoner. Those papers ... Do they mean what I think they do?"

"They mean Joe liked dangerous games," Shayne said. "This is a sort of who's who and where are

they now of all the top mobsters in the country." He held up one of the pictures. "I saw this man earlier tonight. According to this, his name is Louis Sawtell and he used to control half the rackets in the Midwest. Joe's notes say he disappeared six months ago, though."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the old Barrymore place."

Velma paled and bit her lip. "He must have had Joe killed. I just know it."

"Yeah," Shayne grunted. "It sure looks like it." He heard footsteps coming and hastily put everything back in the envelope. Handing it to Velma, he said, "Put this in the mail to Chief Will Gentry in Miami and then call him and tell him what's going on. He'll know the right people to give it to."

She slipped the envelope back into her purse just before Jasper opened the door and said, "Okay, time's up."

The only thing Shayne had left out of the envelope was the picture of the man named Sawtell. He had it safely tucked away in his pocket. Now he said to Velma, "Thanks for coming by."

She gave him a smile and said, "Good luck, Mr. Shayne."

Jasper ushered her out and then returned long enough to say, "You won't be officially charged until morning, Shayne. You can call a lawyer then."

Shayne stretched out on the

bunk. "Whatever you say, Chief."

Jasper gave him a puzzled frown and then went out. Shayne didn't want to explain that he didn't plan on being there in the morning.

Several things seemed clear to the big detective now. Jasper, Copeland, and Jake Donohue were all probably working for Sawtell. That would explain the lack of investigation into Joe Devon's death and the hostile reception that he and Rourke had gotten. Sawtell was in this area incognito, and he didn't want that secrecy violated.

Shayne had to get out and get in touch with the state authorities. Alerting Will Gentry via Velma was only a back-up action, and waiting for results from it could prove fatal.

He hoped that Copeland would be the next one to pay him a visit. For all his brutality, he wasn't as smart as Jasper, and he would be easier to handle. If and until Copeland showed up, Shayne decided, he might as well get some rest.

An hour dragged by before Shayne heard someone else coming. He sat up as the door to the cell block opened.

Buster Copeland came in, looking arrogant and very satisfied with himself. He said, "Howdy, you stinking murderer. How do you like the accommodations, Shayne?"

"I don't," Shayne grunted. "I'd

rather be out at the Barrymore place with Sawtell."

The words had the effect that Shayne had hoped they would. Copeland's jaw dropped and he said, "How — what the hell are you talking about?"

"You know damn well what I'm talking about." Shayne stood up and took the photograph from his pocket, holding it where Copeland could see it. "I'm talking about your boss."

Copeland took a step closer to the cell, his little eyes narrowing. "Where the hell did you get that? Give it here!"

Shayne shook his head. "I don't think so."

"You know, Shayne, you and me are the only ones in the building. What's to stop me from coming in there and taking it away from you?"

Shayne grinned. "Not a damn thing, Buster. You just come ahead."

Shayne waited tensely to see if Copeland would take the bait. The burly officer did, unlocking the door and coming into the cell slowly. He had one hand on the butt of his gun and the other outstretched, palm up. He said, "Don't be stupid, Shayne. Give me the picture."

Shayne said, "Here it is," and held it out. Copeland reached for it.

That brought him into range. Shayne let the photo go and Copeland grabbed at it as it fluttered

toward the floor.

Shayne's big foot came up and buried itself in Copeland's prominent stomach. The officer gasped and started to jerk his gun out.

Shayne was remembering the way Rourke had looked after the beating as he brought his right fist around in a long, looping punch. The blow had all the strength in the redhead's rangy, powerful form behind it. It crashed against Copeland's jaw like a rocket exploding.

The officer slammed into the bars and then fell limply to the floor of the cell. Shayne looked down at him for a moment, massaging his knuckles, and then stooped to take his gun.

He retrieved the picture from the floor and put it back in his pocket, then holding the gun tightly, headed for the door leading out of the cell block. He paused before stepping through it, but no sounds of alarm came to his ears. It looked like Copeland was telling the truth about the building being deserted except for them.

He stepped through the door and a voice from one side said, "Well, well."

Shayne whirled, crouching and bringing the gun up to fire. Jake Donohue yelled, "Wait a minute, Shayne! Don't shoot!"

Shayne stopped his finger from pulling the trigger just in time. Donohue was standing there with his hands up. He grinned and

said, "Looks like you won't need any help in busting out of here after all, Shayne."

X

"WHAT THE HELL are you talking about?" Shayne grated.

"I came to get you out of here," Donohue said. "I finally decided that if you were determined to stick around, we might as well be on the same side. Can I reach in my pocket?"

"Slow and easy."

Donohue took a leather folder out and laid it on the desk, then backed off slightly. "Take a look at that."

Shayne flipped it open and saw the photo and I.D. card with its official seal. "F.B.I.," he grunted in surprise. "Who's the Miami bureau chief?"

Donohue told him, and the answer was right.

"How about the second-in-command?"

Donohue knew that one, too.

Shayne tossed the folder back to him. "You're a damned high-handed operator, Donohue. I suppose you're after Sawtell, too?"

Now it was Donohue's turn to look surprised. "Now how did you know about Sawtell?"

"We can hash that out later. Right now we'd better get out of here before Jasper or one of his other men shows up."

The keys to Shayne's Buick

were on the desk, along with his other property. He gathered it up and led the way out of the police station.

The Buick was parked just outside. Shayne and Donohue piled into it, and Shayne pointed it out of Port McCall as fast as possible.

"You want to head for Sawtell's hide-out?" Shayne asked.

"Yeah. And I'm still wondering how you know about him."

"I was out there earlier tonight and saw him. And Joe Devon's notes identified him for me."

"Damn! I knew I should have burned those notes."

"You've seen them?"

"Yeah, I got into Devon's place and took a look at them the day after he was killed. I didn't destroy them because I thought I might use them as evidence against Sawtell later."

Shayne accelerated as the highway led out of town. He asked, "Why did you pick that fight with me in Angie's?"

"I recognized you when you came in and started asking questions about Devon. I thought maybe you and Rourke would go back to Miami after a night in jail. Listen, Shayne, I've been on Sawtell's trail for months. I didn't want a shamus and a reporter screwing up my investigation."

"So you left us to Copeland's tender mercies," Shayne said dourly.

"I wasn't sure at the time that he was working for Sawtell. Now

I am. I've seen him out there several times."

"How about the chief?"

Donohue frowned. "I'm not sure. From everything I've heard, he's an honest man, but he's certainly playing along with Sawtell on this Devon business. If you and Rourke hadn't come along, he would have marked the case down as unsolved and that would have been the end of it."

Shayne was studying the landscape they were passing. He said, "You didn't take a shot at me right along here yesterday?"

"I told you at the motel, I don't know anything about that. It must have been one of Sawtell's men."

Shayne didn't say anything for a moment. Something seemed wrong, but he couldn't put his finger on what it was. The feeling of overlooking something important came back to him briefly, but he shrugged it off and said, "Why is Sawtell so scared, anyway? No offense, but he can't be that paranoid about the law."

Donohue laughed grimly. "He's not. It's the people who used to be his friends that he's afraid of. There's an open contract on his head."

Shayne shot a glance at the big F.B.I. agent. "A falling out among thieves, that kind of thing?"

"Exactly. The Old Men wound up disowning him, and he had to light out with the few boys who stayed loyal to him."

"I'll bet the man I had to kill tonight wasn't one of his," Shayne guessed shrewdly.

"You're right. I snuck into the morgue and got a look at him when I heard about it. His name was Bennie Travers, also known as Bennie the Blade. I guess he tracked Sawtell down, just like I did, and was trying to collect on the contract. He probably thought you were one of Sawtell's men."

"So what do we do now?" Shayne asked.

"Try to take Sawtell into custody. We can get him for Devon's murder, maybe, and that'll stop his other plan."

"What other plan?"

Donohue's voice was serious as he replied, "Sawtell isn't content to just hide out here, Shayne. He's just laying in wait, consolidating his money and his power for the day he makes a comeback. He's out in the cold now, Shayne, and we don't want him coming back like a phoenix from the ashes."

"I can't blame you for that," Shayne grunted.

They were rapidly approaching the turn-off for the Barrymore house. Shayne went past it and parked the Buick in about the same spot as he had earlier. He and Donohue slipped out of it and began catfooting it back toward the house.

The approach to the house over the open ground was just as harrowing and nerve-wracking as it had been before. Shayne pointed

silently at the living room window, and they made that their destination.

They had just reached it when Shayne heard the screaming tires of a car racing down the highway. As it turned in at the driveway, they could see that it was a Port McCall police car. The two big men ducked back out of the sweep of its headlights as it came up the drive.

It skidded to a stop and a door slammed. Footsteps hurried up onto the verandah, and Shayne heard several excited voices inside the house.

"What the hell are you doing here?" one of them boomed out, and Shayne would have been willing to bet that it belonged to Sawtell.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sawtell," Buster Copeland said, "but I thought you should know that Shayne busted out of jail. He's on the loose again, and he knows who you are."

"What?!"

"He got a picture of you and everything."

"Goddammit!" Sawtell's voice was furious. "What are you and Jasper going to do about it?"

"The chief put an A.P.B. out on Shayne, with orders to shoot on sight. He didn't much want to, but I told him he'd better."

"Damn right he'd better," Sawtell growled, "if he knows what's good for that girl down there."

Outside, Shayne and Donohue exchanged significant glances at those words. Shayne's mind put the last piece into place. Sawtell must be holding a hostage to insure Jasper's cooperation, most likely his daughter. That explained the chief's tortured expression at times. He was struggling with his concern for the girl's safety and his desire to do his duty honestly.

They would have to get the girl to safety first, if at all possible. Storming the house now would in all likelihood get her killed. Shayne's mind was turning over rapidly, trying to pick out the best plan of attack.

He was about to motion Donohue away from the house when Sawtell said to someone else, "Brock, you're responsible for taking care of Shayne if he shows up here. You probably won't be lucky enough to have someone else do your dirty work, like you were with Devon, so be prepared."

"Right, boss."

Outside in the darkness, Shayne frowned. Something didn't jibe, but he didn't have time to dope it out right now. He gestured sharply and led Donohue away from the house.

When they were safely hidden behind some trees, Shayne whispered, "Do you know if Jasper has a daughter?"

"Yeah, I think so. And I'll bet she's locked up in the basement

right now."

"No bet. We've got to get her out of there." A bit of information he had heard earlier in the day popped into Shayne's head. "According to an old story, there's a tunnel leading from the slough to the basement."

"Where did you come up with that?"

Shayne grinned crookedly in the darkness. "You Feds aren't the only guys with sources."

"Do you know where it comes out?"

"I don't even know if it's there. But we'd better go look."

Crouching low, they hurried down the knoll to the slough. Shayne went one way and Donohue the other. A few minutes later, the big redhead found the rotted wooden door set into the bank. He hissed just loud enough to get Donohue's attention and waved him over.

The door had a lock on it, but the wood around it was so soft that it presented no obstacle. They had the door open a moment later.

Donohue produced a small flashlight from his pocket and shone the beam through the entrance. The tunnel inside was braced with wooden beams that looked none too sturdy. The ceiling was low and beginning to crumble in places.

"Doesn't look like it's been used in a long time," Donohue whispered.

"Sawtell probably doesn't know it's here. The entrance on the other end would have been well-concealed, since Barrymore used it to transfer bootleg hooch."

"Well, it's our best way into the house, so ... "

"Let's go."

The air was thick and stale inside the tunnel. Shayne and Donohue hurried along it, being careful not to bump the beams on the sides of the tunnel. It seemed a lot longer than the two hundred yards or so that it actually was.

The tunnel ended in another wooden door. It took a little longer to open this one, but when they had, Donohue scowled and said, "Damn!"

A concrete wall blocked the exit.

"They closed it up," The F.B.I. agent said. "Now what?"

"Just a minute." Shayne knelt and began running his fingers over the concrete. "Shine that light down here."

As Shayne continued his probing, he said, "Remember, I said the entrance was probably well-concealed. What's this?"

He had uncovered some kind of mechanism buried in the sand at the very base of the wall.

Donohue bent to look at it. "Do you think it'll work after all these years?"

"Only one way to find out." Shayne moved a lever gingerly.

The wall swung out and away from them.

They were looking into the base-

ment. On the other side of the room, a teenage girl with long blonde hair was gaping at them. Next to her was a man, probably a guard, looking equally as startled. He came out of his daze and clawed at the gun in his shoulder holster.

Shayne flashed across the room. Speed and silence were of the essence, especially silence. They couldn't afford to alert the others in the house just yet. Shayne had to stop him before he fired a shot.

He was too late.

The gun boomed and the bullet went over his back as Shayne launched himself into a dive. Donohue gave a yelp of pain behind him.

Shayne crashed into the man and drove him backwards. There was a soggy thud as head met concrete wall. The man fell over limply.

Shayne got to his feet. The girl, who was wearing jeans, sandals, and a T-shirt, looked like she was ready to start screaming her head off. Shayne grabbed her shoulders and said urgently, "What's your name?"

"T-Terry," she replied automatically.

"We're going to get you out of here, Terry," he promised. That seemed to calm her down a little.

Shayne turned back to Donohue. The F.B.I. agent was sitting on the floor, a large bloody patch spreading on the right leg of his

trousers. He was very pale, but his voice was strong enough as he said, "Go on, Shayne. Get the girl out of here. I'll buy you some time."

"Hell," Shayne snapped, "what old movie did you get that line out of?" He could hear a growing commotion upstairs.

"No joke, Shayne. I can't run on this leg. Bolt that door over to slow them down, then take Terry out through the tunnel. By the time you get out, they'll be storming the place down here, and you can hit them from above. It makes sense. Now, *move it!*"

Shayne had to admit he was right. He bolted the door, grabbed Terry's hand, and said to Donohue, "I'll be back."

"You damned well better be!"

Terry hesitated for a second at the entrance to the tunnel. In a shaky voice, she said, "It — it doesn't look too safe."

"It's safer than staying here," Shayne rasped.

Donohue mumbled, "Thanks a lot."

At Shayne's urging, the girl climbed into the tunnel and began running toward the far end. Shayne stayed right behind her, and when they burst out at the edge of the slough, he said, "Listen, Terry, do you know your way around here?"

She was gasping for breath. "I grew up ... in Port McCall."

Gunfire began crackling inside the house. Shayne cast a grim look

in that direction and then said, "Head back to town as quick as you can. Get hold of your father so he'll know you're safe and tell him to get out here with as many honest cops as he's got. It wouldn't hurt to call the state police, either."

Terry nodded and began running again, skirting the Barrymore estate and heading for the highway.

His long legs churning, Shayne sprinted up the knoll as fast as he could. The gunfire was heavier inside the house now. Donohue must have been putting up quite a fight.

Shayne gripped his gun tighter and took the steps leading up to the verandah in one bound. The front door was open, and as he ran through it, a gun-wielding figure popped up on his right.

The man's gun blasted and then Shayne let loose a shot of his own. The man spun backwards with a howl.

The stairway leading down to the basement was directly in front of him at the end of a long hall. Shayne started for the stairs just as another man appeared at the top of them. For one frozen instant, Officer Buster Copeland, a big bruise on his jaw, stared at Mike Shayne, the man who had given it to him.

Then Copeland's gun came up.

Shayne dropped into a crouch as Copeland fired. Slugs buzzed around his head.

Calmly, Shayne lined up his sights on Copeland's shirt pocket and squeezed the trigger.

Copeland's next shot went wild as Shayne's bullet hit its target. With a shriek, he tumbled backwards down the stairs.

Shayne ran down the hall and threw himself on the floor to make himself a smaller target from below. There were three men at the foot of the stairs, not counting Copeland's sprawled body. Sawtell was firing into the basement at Donohue. His two men turned toward Shayne. The three criminals were in a crossfire now.

Shayne dropped one of them with a well-placed shot. The other, sensing the outcome, flung his gun down and cried, "Don't shoot!"

Sawtell turned toward his surrendering henchman and screamed, "Damn you, Brock! You can't quit on —"

Donohue's gun barked once from the basement.

Sawtell clawed at his side, swayed, and fell.

Shayne stood up slowly. Motioning with his gun to the man called Brock, he said, "Get on in there." He raised his voice. "Donohue, are you okay?"

"Yeah," Donohue's voice came weakly. "Wish I hadn't had to shoot Sawtell, though."

Shayne paused at the bottom of the stairs to examine the mobster chief and then went on into the basement. Donohue had used a

heavy wooden table as a shield, and it was covered with bullet marks. There was a fresh blood stain on his left shoulder.

Shayne kept Brock covered and said to the Federal agent, "You'll still get your collar, Donohue. Sawtell's alive. You just hit him enough to tear up some muscles and knock him out."

Donohue grinned. "I'm glad you got here when you did, Shayne. Did the girl get away all right?"

"I think so. We'll know pretty soon, if her father shows up. I told her to send him out here."

Despite his wounds, Donohue couldn't contain his enthusiasm. He exclaimed, "By God, now we've got Sawtell for kidnapping, as well as murder!" He turned to Brock and gestured at Shayne. "Now that you've run into this big redhead whirlwind, I'll bet you wish you hadn't killed Devon!"

Brock cursed bitterly. "That's the hell of the whole thing," he wailed.

"What do you mean?" Shayne snapped.

"We didn't kill Devon! Somebody beat us to it!"

XI

NOT ONLY was Tim Rourke sitting up in his hospital bed when Shayne came into the room the next morning, but he had a portable typewriter balanced pre-

cariously on a board across his knees. He was pecking away at it grimly, his face a mask of concentration.

Shayne grinned and said, "You seem to have made a rapid recovery. They must have great-looking nurses in this place."

"I haven't noticed," Rourke replied bitterly. "I've been too busy writing about this redhead galoot who's always getting into trouble."

Shayne turned a chair around and straddled it. "Who told you about it?"

"Chief Jasper came by earlier to fill me in on everything and apologize for what happened. He's a lot nicer guy now that his daughter is safe."

"Yeah. He was a big help last night in mopping things up. Is it all right to smoke in here?"

"I guess so, I've been doing it when I think I won't get caught. You know, Donohue even called me from his room down the hall. I was surprised to find out he was a Fed."

"You and me both." Shayne took a deep drag on his cigarette, then stood up and moved to the window. As he looked out at the clear blue sky, he said, "You know, Tim, one thing bothers me about the whole mess. Sawtell's lieutenant, Brock, claims that they didn't kill Joe Devon. He admits freely that he was ordered to by Sawtell, but he says somebody beat him to it."

"You don't believe him, do you, Mike? He's just trying to save his own skin."

Shayne tugged distractedly on his earlobe for a moment before answering. "I've been doing a lot of thinking since last night, and I think I've figured out something that was bugging me. I think Brock is telling the truth, Tim."

Rourke started to ask a question when the door opened again and Velma McBride put her head into the room. "Is it all right if I come in? I thought I might find you here, Mr. Shayne."

"Sure," Rourke said. "You're Velma, aren't you?"

"That's right." She came into the room carrying a vase of flowers. "I brought these for you, Mr. Rourke. I'm so glad Joe had friends like you and Mr. Shayne."

"Then I think you'll like what I'm doing here," Rourke said, gesturing at the typewriter. "I'm writing the story of everything that happened for my newspaper. Take a look."

Velma leaned over to look at what was typed on the page. Her face broke into a smile. "You're sharing your by-line with Joe! How thoughtful, Mr. Rourke."

"Call me Tim. And it's really Joe's story."

Shayne hadn't said anything so far. Now he asked Velma, "Is Luther working over at the station today? I need to gas up my Buick."

"Yes, I believe he's over there,

Mr. Shayne."

Shayne nodded politely to Velma and said to Rourke, "I'll see you later, Tim." He went out with a wave.

He snapped the cigarette butt away before he got into his car, and his craggy face was set in grim, hard lines. Rourke would just have to rewrite the ending of the story.

Luther came out with a smile as Shayne pulled into the station. He said, "You need gas again, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne got out of the Buick and leaned against it. "Yeah, top off the tank, Luther."

"I heard about what happened last night. Pretty exciting."

"I guess so. Say, Luther, how did you feel about Joe Devon?"

Luther gave him a startled glance. "What? Why — why, I liked him all right, I suppose."

"How did you feel about him marrying your sister?"

"I ... I guess it was okay, if that's what Velma wanted."

Shayne changed the subject abruptly. "You get pretty greasy working around a gas station, don't you?"

Luther looked down at his stained shirt and said, "Yeah, I guess so."

"You know, I saw a picture of Joe Devon's body. He had stains on his shirt where the killer grabbed him from behind. When I asked Chief Jasper about them, he said they were grease stains."

Luther's face began to flush with anger. "What are you trying to say, Mr. Shayne?"

"Just thinking out loud, Luther." Shayne paused and let his cold gray eyes rake over the young man's face. "Thinking about a shot somebody took at me yesterday afternoon not long after I talked to you and your sister. I checked with your boss, and you weren't here yesterday afternoon."

"Now just w-wait a minute," Luther stammered. "Are you trying to say that I k-killed Mr. Devon and tried to kill you, Mr. Shayne?"

"I'm saying there's some evidence pointing in that direction."

"Y-you call that evidence?"

Shayne leveled his eyes in a cold, direct stare. "Then I guess you won't mind if Chief Jasper and I search your room at your sister's house. Some of Devon's things were taken to make it look like a robbery. You did get rid of them, didn't you, Luther?"

Luther's face twisted in rage. Without warning, he jerked the gas nozzle out of the Buick and send the vile stuff spewing toward Shayne.

The redhead threw his arms up to protect his face. He kept the gas out of his eyes, but it splashed everywhere else. The fumes were almost enough to overwhelm him.

Shayne launched himself for-

ward. One hand knocked the nozzle aside, and then he crashed into Luther.

The young man was stronger than Shayne had expected. He wrapped his arms around the big detective and squeezed. Shayne felt his ribs begin to protest. He drove the heel of his hand up at Luther's chin.

The blow loosened Luther's grip. Shayne tore away from him and threw two quick, hard blows to his opponent's belly. Luther doubled up, gasping for air, and Shayne straightened him up with an uppercut that started almost from the ground. Luther bounced off the Buick and then folded up on the concrete.

Shayne heard the screech of wheels behind him and turned around to see Chief Willie Jasper getting out of a police car. "Dammit, Shayne," the chief bit off, "I thought you were going to let me handle this."

"I thought it over," Shayne said grimly, "and I decided that I'd rather have Velma hating me than hating you."

Luther struggled to a sitting position and looked up at them. His expression was that of a small boy caught stealing cookies. He said, "I-I only did it for Velma, Chief. Mr. Devon wouldn't have taken care of her. He drank too much. Besides, they would have made me move out once they got married."

"All right, Luther," the chief

said gently. "You can tell me all about it later. Right now let's just go on down to the station."

Shayne shook his head as he watched the chief drive away with Luther. Murder was one hell of a business, especially at times like this.

A new voice said behind him, "You don't look so good, Mike. What was that all about?"

He turned to see Angie standing there, looking fresh and very attractive this morning. He forced a smile onto his lips and said, "It's a long story."

"Why don't you come back to my place and clean up and tell me about it?"

Mike Shayne nodded slowly. "I think I'll do that," he said.

**COMING
IN OUR NEXT ISSUE**

DIAMONDS ARE DEADLY
The New Mike Shayne Short Novel
by Brett Halliday

DEATH ON THE STRIP (Part II)
The Exciting Conclusion
of Sammy Chung's Las Vegas Adventure
by Gary Brandner

DON'T MISS IT!

DEATH ON THE STRIP

by Gary Brandner

Sammy Chung, the Famous Oriental Detective, Visits Las Vegas — and Finds Intrigue and Murder!

THE WEIGHT OF THE GUN could not have been more than a pound, but to Amy Tobin it seemed to drag her arm down like a cannonball. She switched the leather purse to her left hand and continued along the blacktopped driveway in front of the four plush bungalow units belonging to the Oasis Hotel. The lights of the hotel's main building were visible on the far side of a par-three golf course that was separated from the bungalows by a chest-high brick wall.

Amy shivered in the breeze. The few lightweight clothes she had brought from Honolulu were little protection against the chill April evenings of Las Vegas.

Only one of the bungalows showed a light. How like Joe Romo, Amy thought, to wait confidently in his room as the evening action of the gambling city got underway. While others were out looking for their own

brand of excitement Joe Romo would let the action come to him. It seemed that everything and everyone had always come to him. Joe Romo never had to go looking for anything.

Amy paused for a moment at the walk that led up to the door of Romo's bungalow. She forced herself to take several deep breaths, fighting for composure. In her mind she ran over what she was going to say. The last thing she wanted was to appear ridiculous. She could not bear to have him laugh at her.

When she felt her emotions were under control, Amy proceeded up the cement walk, white against the dark of the thick, well-watered lawn. The bungalows were Hollywood-Moorish style with a glittery substance mixed into the stucco. The soft light above Romo's door washed over Amy's blonde hair. Usually it was brushed to a glossy halo, but

tonight odd strands floated loose in the breeze.

A muted buzzer sounded somewhere inside as Amy touched the pearl button next to the door. She waited, dabbing a finger at the droplets of perspiration that had formed on her upper lip. She pushed the buzzer again.

The door opened and Joe Romo lounged in the entrance wearing a soft open-collared shirt and checked slacks. He was a well-built man, clean shaven, with a head of thick black curls. His eyes were a startling blue, and his mouth curled upward slightly in habitual arrogance.

"What are you doing here?" he said. "I'm expecting somebody."

"A woman?" Amy blurted before she could stop herself.

"Business," Romo said shortly. "Not that it's any concern of yours. I thought I made it clear how we stood before I left Honolulu."

"I couldn't believe you meant what you said."

"I meant it, sugar, it's all over."

"Joe, I have to talk to you."

Romo glanced impatiently at his watch and said, "Oh, all right, come in, but I can only spare a few minutes. I really don't see that we have anything more to talk about."

He led the way into the living room and sat down at a writing table which he used to keep a

space between them. He slipped a sheet of ledger paper into a drawer and looked up at the girl with folded hands.

"Well, Amy?"

"Joe, why are you doing this to me? You always said that if you were free of Nancy you and I could make plans together. Now you're separated from her and you ... you avoid me."

"Just let it be, can't you?"

"You aren't still in love with Nancy?"

"Don't be stupid. Clinging women like her give me a pain. I was nuts to get married in the first place. It'll be a cold day when I let some broad tie me down again."

"We don't have to be married, Joe. Can't we just be together?"

"We've *been* together, sugar. We had some laughs, some good times, and nobody got hurt. Leave it at that, okay?"

"Joe, I love you. Doesn't that mean anything?"

"Sure," he grinned. "It means I'm loveable." Abruptly his smile fell away. "Grow up, sugar, it's all over. Go on home and find a nice boy in your own crowd. One who works in a brokerage and goes sailing."

Amy's hand moved to the clasp of her purse. "I can't do that, Joe. I told my father I was leaving home to be with you. We had a bitter fight about it. I can't go back."

Romo threw back his handsome head and laughed. "So that's it.

She stamped her foot and threw a tantrum, now she's afraid to go home or daddy will spank. That must have been something to see — the right honorable Judge Henry Tobin seething inside while his only daughter runs off to be with the notorious Joe Romo. I wish I could have been there."

"It isn't funny, Joe. I can't go back."

"The hell you can't. You're not pregnant, are you?"

"Of course not."

"Then it's no sweat. Sure, you may have to eat a little crow, and maybe he'll cut your allowance for a while, but the old boy will take his baby back."

"Is that your last word?"

"That's it. No hard feelings, sugar? Come here and I'll kiss you good-bye."

Amy's hand dipped into the purse and her fingers closed around the grip of the small pistol. She pulled the gun out and pointed it across the table at Romo.

His eyes widened for an instant, then he relaxed and roared with laughter. "Come on, sugar, don't tell me you really came here to shoot me? With that little bitty thing? You don't even know how to hold it right."

It was true, the pistol felt hard and awkward in her hand. Amy had never fired any kind of a weapon in her life. She realized now that she had not really intended to use the gun tonight either. If only Romo hadn't started

to laugh at her ...

Amy squeezed the trigger and flinched away from the explosion she expected. The actual report from the gun made surprisingly little noise.

"Hey!" Romo shouted, and started to rise from his chair.

The little gun popped again and again. Romo cried out in pain and toppled over backwards, taking the chair with him to the floor.

Amy opened her eyes, which she had squinted nearly closed as she fired. She saw the splash of bright blood on the writing table, and the sprawled body of Joe Romo lying between the table and the rear wall of the bungalow. With a little whimpering cry she turned and ran back toward the door, her only thought to get away from the dead man.

Through the front door and out into the night she ran, across the spongy lawn toward the driveway. Suddenly she stopped. Someone was coming this way from the direction of the hotel. Only a head was visible over the golf course wall, silhouetted against the reflected neon glow from the Strip. The figure stopped, and the head turned toward her. Amy could not distinguish the features, but she knew she had been seen.

Without thinking Amy started to run. She headed out the driveway to the street, down the long block, then back toward Las Vegas Boulevard — the Strip. Not until

she slowed to catch her breath did Amy become aware that something felt wrong about her purse. She clutched at the soft bag, then tore it open and plunged her hand inside. The gun was not there.

II

THE IMMACULATE 1947 Oldsmobile rolled to a stop in front of the sprawling stone house on Kalihi Drive. Sammy Chung stepped out of the car and closed the door carefully. The day was blue and clear, and below the ridge the city of Honolulu sparkled all the way to Mamala Bay. Sammy Chung, however, had no eyes for the view this day. His step lacked its usual spring as he approached the door of his old friend Judge Henry Tobin.

It was many years ago that the junior prosecutor and the young Chinese policeman had worked together on their first criminal case. Today the white-haired Superior Court judge and the portly Inspector for the Honolulu Police Department remained close friends, each a frequent guest at the home of the other.

Chung's mission at the judge's home today was not a pleasant one. Normally a uniformed patrolman would make a routine call like this, but because of his long friendship with Henry Tobin, Chung had driven out in person.

The judge himself answered the door.

"Sammy, this is a surprise. Come on in. Aren't you working today?"

"Regrettably, I am," said the detective.

The judge sobered as he studied his friend's face. "What is it, Sammy? Police business?"

"Police business, yes. Also personal."

"Let's go inside."

Chung followed Judge Tobin into a large living room where the furniture was the kind a man could sit on without fear of breaking something. Chung shook his head slightly when Tobin offered him a chair, and the judge remained standing too.

"What is it, Sammy?"

Chung withdrew a sheet of paper from his inside pocket and read from it. "A query arrived from the mainland concerning a pistol, an Erma .25-caliber automatic, serial number 21E37584. The gun is registered to you."

"I'd have to look up the serial number," Tobin said, "but that sounds like a gun I bought a couple of years ago. What about it?"

"The gun is not now in your possession," said Chung. It was not a question.

"No. I gave it to my daughter Amy last year when we had that series of burglaries up here and I often had to be away at night. Sammy, what is this all about?"

"The gun is now in the pos-

session of the Las Vegas police. It was found at the scene of a homicide in that city."

"I don't believe it."

"I double checked with Las Vegas myself," said Chung, "and am sorry to say their report was accurate. Questions are now a most unpleasant duty. I hoped to make it easier by coming myself."

"Thank you, Sammy, I appreciate that," Tobin said. "What can I tell you?"

"Is it possible to speak with Amy?"

The judge passed a hand slowly across his eyes. "I only wish it were," he said. "A week ago Amy and I ... well, we had rather a bitter argument. She walked out of the house and I haven't heard from her since."

"Did the argument perhaps involve a local gambler named Joe Romo?"

"Good Lord, is it common knowledge?"

"Romo's activities have long been under police scrutiny. Your daughter's name has come up."

"I see. Well, I guess it hasn't exactly been a secret. Amy has been throwing herself at that man for the past six months. Why is it, Sammy, that a girl like Amy would make a complete fool of herself over a heel like Romo?"

"That mystery is still unsolved," said Chung. "From the beginning of history women who know better have been attracted to rogues, often to their sorrow.

This Romo, especially, has always exerted a strange magnetic power over women."

"There is a connection, isn't there," Tobin said, "between Joe Romo and the letter you got from Las Vegas."

Chung nodded solemnly. "A tragic connection. Joe Romo was shot dead two days ago in a Las Vegas hotel. The gun registered to you was found at the scene."

"What about Amy?" the judge said, his voice unsteady.

"Until today her name had not entered the case. Sadly, that is now unavoidable."

Judge Tobin sagged onto a sofa and reached with shaking hand for a decanter on the coffee table. He poured himself a small glass of brandy and drank. Suddenly his face looked older than his 55 years.

"I've always objected to Amy's relationship with Romo," he said. "But she was a headstrong girl, and an adult after all, so there wasn't much I could do. Perhaps if I hadn't made such a point of it at first ... well, that's of no importance now. What started the trouble a week ago was that Amy told me Romo had separated from his wife, and she was going to join him. I repeated all the things I'd said before about Romo's rotten reputation, which was exactly the wrong thing to do. Amy said she loved the man, and nothing in the world was going to keep her from him. Then she walked out,

and that was the last time I saw her."

"This argument with Amy took place a week ago?"

"That's right, it was last Wednesday. Why?"

"Exactly five days ago Joe Romo's wife died by drowning. All evidence points to suicide. I understand the wife's relatives in the mainland's Pacific Northwest have been contacted, but we were unable to find Romo until receiving this letter from the Las Vegas police."

Judge Tobin shook his head slowly. "That's terrible. Actually, I was surprised to hear that Romo was married at all. He didn't seem to be the type."

"That opinion is shared by most of his acquaintances. Little seems to be known of his late wife except that her name was Nancy, she met Romo while visiting here from the mainland, and was generally considered to be not his type at all."

"Could Romo have had something to do with her death?" The judge was unable to keep the hopeful note out of his voice.

"He may, indeed, bear much responsibility, but not in the way you suggest, my friend. The suicide verdict is unquestionably correct. Several witnesses saw Mrs. Romo walk alone into the surf. A small woman, and not a strong swimmer, she was soon swept out to sea. A note she left behind said she did not want to go

on living without her husband. Another example of Romo's powerful attraction for the opposite sex. Even with the witnesses and the suicide note we might have suspected Romo, except that it is known he departed for the mainland 24 hours before his wife's death."

"And now Amy is suspected of killing Romo," Judge Tobin said.

"Not officially as yet, but when our report reaches the Las Vegas authorities Amy will indeed be in trouble."

"Sammy, I know this is a lot to ask, but is there any chance you could go yourself to Las Vegas? If Amy is there and in trouble, she'll need a friend badly."

Chung considered for a moment. "Although it is not normal procedure, the fact that both murdered man and likely suspect are from Honolulu should justify to the commissioner journey of local policeman to Nevada. As for me, the request of a friend is justification enough."

"What can I do to help you?"

"Was there anyone in Las Vegas your daughter knew, someone she might go to?"

"There was a friend Amy had when she was away at school ... What was that girl's name? The two of them were practically inseparable, into everything together. One summer Amy brought the other girl here so they could spend their vacation together. Let me get Amy's yearbook. There'll

be a picture of the girl in there."

Judge Tobin left the room for a moment and returned carrying a volume bound in padded leather with embossed gold lettering on the cover. A fitting yearbook for Sereno College, an exclusive women's school in Santa Barbara. The judge rifled through the pages, then stopped and tapped a picture with his forefinger.

"This is Amy's friend — Jewell Barr."

Chung took the book from Tobin and studied the photograph. It was a dark-haired girl with a wide mouth and expressive eyes that seemed to glow with a hint of mischief. Beneath her name was printed the information that Jewell Barr was a drama major and belonged to the water ski club.

Chung said, "Graduation from college two years ago would make Miss Barr 23 or 24 years old."

"I suppose so. Amy is 23."

Chung flipped the pages until he came to the picture of a smiling blonde girl. The legend read: *Amy Tobin, Sociology, Water-Ski Club.*

"I can't believe my daughter would kill anybody," Tobin said. "Find her, Sammy. Try to help her."

"I will do my best, old friend," said Chung.

The judge walked him to the door and stood watching as Chung climbed into the elderly Oldsmobile and drove slowly away down the winding ridge road.

As he drove Chung tried to reconcile his memory of the lively intelligent girl with the act of shooting a man to death. He could understand the judge's refusal to believe, but having been in police work for many years, Sammy Chung well knew that the seed of murder could grow in the most unlikely soil.

III

MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL Airport on the edge of Las Vegas was, as usual, awash with tourists as Sammy Chung alighted from the 727 jet the next afternoon. In the casual crowd of men in sport shirts and women in pant suits the oriental detective was easily recognizable in his quiet business suit and high-crowned hat. As he stepped into the terminal he was greeted by a blocky man in a rumpled brown sport jacket and slacks. He had close-cropped hair and a weary face with the hard, suspicious eyes of the professional policeman.

"Inspector Chung?" he said.

"Yes."

"I'm Bert Kagle, lieutenant, homicide, Las Vegas police department. I have a car out front, I'll drive you down to the station."

Chung claimed his two pieces of leather luggage and accompanied Kagle through the terminal, where incoming tourists were already feeding the slot machines. Out in front of the building they entered

an unmarked and unwashed Plymouth sedan. The lieutenant stuck a cigarette in his mouth, lit it, and drove west on Tropicana Avenue to Las Vegas Boulevard. There he turned right and headed up the famous Strip.

"Is this your first trip to our city, Mr. Chung?"

"I have visited before, but not in some years. The hotels seem larger than I remember them."

"Yes, a lot of them have gone highrise or built new annexes in the last few years."

Although mid-afternoon was considered a lull period in the casinos of Las Vegas, the Strip was still clotted with traffic, and the flow of people was constant from one gambling room to another in search of the elusive Lady Luck.

At night the giant electric signs of the big hotels would turn the Strip into a glittering path to Fantasyland. In the daytime, with all the tiny flaws visible in bright sunshine, the city was like a tired chorus girl in the morning, who hadn't removed her stage make-up.

As Kagle drove north the towering signs identifying the famous hotels marched by on both sides of the street. Tropicana, Flamingo, Caesar's Palace, Oasis, Desert Inn, Stardust. Each of the hotels proudly advertised the big show business names appearing there or soon to appear. The warm breeze blowing off the desert

seemed to carry with it the smell of money.

They drove past Fremont Street, the less plush, but even busier downtown Casino Center, and two more blocks to City Hall. Lt. Kagle's office — scarred desk, dented filing cabinets, uncomfortable chairs — was like policemen's offices the world over. An unlikely place for the playing out of so many human dramas of life and death.

Kagle lit a fresh cigarette and mashed the old one into an ashtray that already overflowed with butts.

"We put a tail on Jewel Barr as soon as I got your wire yesterday," he said. "Do you think she'll lead us to the Tobin girl?"

"The possibility seems strong. Aside from Joe Romo, Miss Barr is the only person Amy Tobin knew here in Las Vegas."

"Well, she hasn't led us anywhere yet, just between her apartment and the Oasis, where she works."

"Same hotel where Romo met death," Chung observed. "Interesting. Is Miss Barr part of the show at the Oasis?"

"No, she's just a cocktail waitress. What made you think she was a show girl?"

"Her major study in college was drama. Apparently a diploma is no help in obtaining job in show business."

"That's a fact," Kagle agreed. "Not in this town, anyway. Bust

measurement is more important here than I.Q. Do you want to see the reports on Romo's death before we go over to the hotel?"

"Very much."

Kagle punched a button on his desk phone, spoke briefly into the instrument, and hung up. He said, "I can give you the facts briefly. He died about seven o'clock Monday evening. We can fix the time pretty close because he was seen from the golf course entering his bungalow at 6:30 alone, and the condition of the body when it was found at nine showed he had been dead at least two hours.

"The cause of death was a single .25-caliber slug in the brain. The bullet that killed him plus three others we dug out of the wall came from the Erma automatic we found in the room. No prints on the gun. Naturally."

Chung smiled. "Like you, I cannot remember a case where usable fingerprints were obtained from the murder gun. Have details of the killing been made public?"

"Only the victim's name and cause of death. Murder doesn't get a big play in the local news. Bad for the tourist trade."

A secretary entered the office and laid a thin manila folder on Kagle's desk. He pushed it across to Chung, who opened it and scanned the papers within.

"Who discovered the body?" Chung asked.

"Frank Dallasandro. He manages the Camel Room at the

Oasis. That's their big show room."

"Employees of Oasis seem much involved," Chung remarked. He set aside the report of the investigating officers, and studied the results of the medical examination and the laboratory report.

"I see the murdered man suffered a second wound."

"That's right. One of the shots creased his skull. Laid the scalp open pretty good, but it was the brain shot that killed him. Dead center in the forehead."

"Excellent location for fatal shot," Chung observed. "Laboratory report on murder weapons mentions a bit of leaf that was found caught in the trigger guard. Has this been identified?"

"I'll find out," Kagle said. He started to pick up the phone, then cradled it again as a white-jacketed young man crossed in front of the open office door. "Paul, got a minute?" he called.

The young man pulled up short and swung into the office. "What's up, Lieutenant?"

"That green stuff you found on the Romo gun, have you identified it?"

"We just confirmed it. It's *stenotaphrum*, also called St. Augustine grass. It's used for lawns."

"Anything unusual about it?"

"For around here there is. The only place in Las Vegas we've been able to find the stuff is the

grassy area in front of the bungalows at the Oasis Hotel."

Kagle nodded his thanks and the young man left the office. The lieutenant turned back to Chang.

"I don't know how soon you have to be back in Honolulu, Inspector, but if it's possible I'd like you to stay around for a few days. Since you're familiar with both the victim and the number one suspect, you could give us a lot of help."

"It will be my pleasure," said Chung. "I was, in fact, about to make the same suggestion myself."

"Good. Is there anything else I can fill you in on?"

"Not at the moment. Perhaps it will be of value to question Miss Jewell Barr now. Further surveillance is not likely to uncover anything new."

"Right." Kagle checked his watch. "She's due to go to work at the Oasis at eight. We can catch her there."

"Excellent. That will provide opportunity to meet other persons involved, also secure lodgings for my stay in your city."

IV

THE OASIS HOTEL was neither the biggest nor the newest on the Las Vegas Strip, but its garish front competed for attention on near equal terms with the others. Four towering palm trees marked the entrance, their steel-rein-

forced trunks carrying clusters of neon tubes high into the desert sky.

Over the main entrance, a simulated Arabian tent, a sign proclaimed: *Boots Malloy Twice Nightly in the Camel Room.*

Boots Malloy, a veteran comedian who had once had a network television show, played in a couple of movies, but was best known for his work in night clubs. Something in the back of Chung's mind hinted at a connection between Boots Malloy and his present mission in Las Vegas. When he could not immediately bring the thought to the surface Chung switched his attention to other things. It would come to him soon enough.

Kagle parked the Plymouth in a space clearly marked *No Parking*, ignored the scowl of the doorman, and led the way into the hotel.

As in all Las Vegas hotels, the first thing to greet the entering guests was the casino. This is, after all, the reason for the hotel's existence. The layout in the Oasis included blackjack, roulette, craps, and at the far end a wheel of fortune. Behind a roped-off area were tables for baccarat and high-stakes poker. Surrounding the area were the ever-present sentinels of the city, the slot machines. The oiled whirr of the slots, the *kachunk kachunk* as the fruit symbols fell into place, and the occasional clatter of coins into the cups was a constant

background to the other casino sounds. It was always there if you listened for it, like traffic or the surf.

A tall suntanned man with neatly styled gray hair and alert brown eyes crossed the casino's deep red carpet to meet the policemen.

"Hello, Frank," Kagle said. "This is Inspector Chung of the Honolulu Police Department — Frank Dallasandro, manager of the Camel Room."

"Hello, Mr. Chung," Dallasandro said. "Are you here on business or vacation?"

"Business, unfortunately. Lt. Kagle has been kind enough to accept my assistance in investigating the death of Mr. Joe Romo, a Honolulu resident. I understand it was you who found the body."

"That's right. It was about nine o'clock. I had some business to talk over with Joe, and I walked across to the bungalow where he was staying. Nobody answered the buzzer, and the door was open a crack, so I walked in. Joe was on the floor behind a little table, staring at the ceiling. There was blood on the table and the floor, and a hole right between his eyes."

"You were well acquainted with Mr. Romo?" Chung asked.

"He and I used to work for the same people in Chicago a few years back. A year ago I helped him set up his own club in the

islands. He wanted to run a class establishment, but all he'd done before was ... other things."

Chung smiled. "The Honolulu police are aware of Mr. Romo's 'other things,' his illegal gambling activities. He was raided at least once a month, but evidence sufficient for a conviction was never found."

"Joe knew he'd be closed up eventually, that's why he wanted to get into the legitimate night club business. I let him book one of my top acts for his opening to get him started right."

"Would that act be the same Boots Malloy who is now featured in the Camel Room here?"

"That's right. Boots is one of the best standup comics in the business. His two weeks at Romo's club brought in a lot of customers."

As he had known it would, the connection clicked into place for Chung. He remembered the newspaper ads now, *Roman Room — Grand Opening — Starring Boots Malloy Direct from Las Vegas*. A coincidence? Possibly. But Sammy Chung was no believer in coincidence.

"I would enjoy meeting Mr. Malloy," he said.

"Sure," said Dallasandro. "I'll take you back now and introduce you."

"You go on ahead," Kagle said. "Meanwhile I'll check up on the lady we talked about."

Chung was pleased to note that,

like a good policeman, Kagle did not name names unnecessarily in public.

Dallasandro led the way through the casino. No one looked up to note their passing. The eyes of the gamblers and dealers were fixed on the falling cards, the spinning wheels, the dancing cubes.

"Are you a gambler, Mr. Chung?" Dallasandro asked.

"Gambling has long been a popular pastime of the Chinese," Chung answered. "I indulge in an occasional game of cards and trip to the race track."

"How's your luck?"

"It is my good fortune that I have another source of income."

Dallasandro laughed. "You've got the right idea. The only man who makes money off gambling is the man who owns the house."

"Do your duties include managing the casino?" Chung asked.

"No, I strictly run the show room. The casino is completely separate. The only connection I have with it is trying to drag some of my stars away from the tables when it's time to go on."

"Show people are heavy gamblers?"

"Mr. Chung, I could tell you stories about some of the best-loved entertainers in the country that would curl your hair."

"Perhaps best I do not hear them," Chung smiled. "Present hair style is most satisfactory."

At the far end of the casino a uniformed security guard stood

next to a double door lettered *Camel Room — Show Times 8:00 P.M. and Midnight*. The guard nodded at Dallasandro, and the two men walked through into an amphitheater with tiers of tables rising from a semicircular stage. White linen and silver gleamed on the tables as busboys hurried about adjusting the dinner setups.

"It is larger than I would have thought," Chung said.

"We can seat four hundred," Dallasandro told him proudly. "With an attraction like Boots Malloy nearly every show is a sellout."

"Remarkable," said Chung. "Mr. Malloy must be a most talented comedian."

"Oh, he's a funny man on stage," Dallasandro agreed, "as long as his wife keeps writing his material."

"An interesting relationship."

"That it is. Isobel's about ten years older than he is, and not the type you'd expect Boots to go for."

"Mr. Malloy has an eye for pretty girls?"

"That's putting it mildly. He used to be quite a player before Isobel clamped down on him. A couple of years ago she got fed up and walked out. That's when he found out how much he needed her. His act bombed without her writing for him. Now she keeps him in line by threatening to cut off his material."

Chung and Dallasandro walked

through a door at one side of the stage. The surroundings changed abruptly from the glitter of the show room to bare concrete. The corridor they were in extended back to where an exit sign indicated a door at the rear of the building. Along one wall a door to the backstage area was propped open with workmen carrying equipment in and out. On the opposite wall were a number of unpainted wooden doors that had a temporary look about them.

"We're rebuilding back here," Dallasandro apologized. "By summer we'll have all new dressing rooms, but for now the talent has to share the space with the girls who work the bar and the casino."

As though to illustrate Dallasandro's comment, two young women, their long legs encased in net stockings, and a minimum of other clothes covering the rest of them, emerged from the first of the doors. They walked by talking together, and paid no attention to the men.

Dallasandro tapped lightly at the second door. The door swung in, and Chung's first impression was that it had been opened by a child. A closer look revealed that it was a mature man who stood no taller than five feet three. The boyishness of the round face and fine pale hair was offset only slightly by tiny lines around the eyes.

Before Dallasandro could speak,

the little man held up a cautionary hand and moved his head slightly toward the back of the room. The dressing room was divided roughly in half by a curtain pulled across the width of it. From behind the curtain came the voice of a woman, shrill in anger.

"How much did you lose out there today?" the woman snapped. "I want an answer."

"I don't know, Isobel," a man answered in a placating tone. "Not much. A hundred maybe."

"I heard it was more like a couple of thousand. You told me you weren't going to gamble any more."

"This wasn't gambling. I just took a couple of shots at the dice table. It's good for business to have me mingle with the customers once in a while."

"You'd better learn how to mingle without blowing our money. And without putting your hands on other women."

"Sweetheart," the man's voice pleaded, "I haven't so much as looked at another woman. Not since that time in Tahoe. Believe me."

The three men backed out into the hall and the little man closed the door. The angry voice of the woman could still be clearly heard as she reminded the man of the bad things that would happen to him if she ever caught him with another woman.

"Husband and wife discussion," the little man explained

with a wry smile.

"This is Lou Gaffney," Dallasandro said, making the introduction. "Inspector Chung of the Honolulu police. We were hoping to see Boots Malloy."

"If you can wait a few minutes," Gaffney said, "you might catch him between rounds. I don't think it would be wise to go in right now."

Dallasandro glanced at his watch. "I should get out to the bar and check on the liquor supply for tonight."

"Do not feel you must remain for my sake," said Chung. "I will find my way around."

"All right, then," said Dallasandro. "I'll see you later."

"Are you a fan of Boots Malloy, Inspector?" Gaffney asked when he and Chung were alone.

"I confess I have never seen Mr. Malloy work," Chung said. "He is most popular, I understand."

"He pulls in the paying customers, that's for sure." Gaffney said. "His act would be a little rough for a ladies' club, but he knocks 'em dead in the saloons."

"You are an old friend of Mr. Malloy?"

Gaffney smiled crookedly. "Not exactly. I'm on his payroll. Do you know what a gofer is?"

"Unless you mean the small animal that burrows under lawns, the answer is no."

"In show business a gofer is the

guy a star keeps around to go for coffee, or go for the morning paper — an errand boy, really. I don't mean to sound bitter," he added hastily. "The work is easy and the pay is good, and if it weren't for Boots I'd probably be boxing groceries in a supermarket."

Chung studied the face of the little man. "Excuse me for staring, Mr. Gaffney, but I feel sure I have seen you before somewhere."

"Not in the last five years you haven't," Gaffney said.

"That would be it. Just about five years ago, were you not on television yourself? Saturday mornings, I believe, in a program called *Jumbo and Junior*."

Gaffney's face lit up with pleasure. "That was me. I played Junior, needless to say. It was a syndicated kiddie show. Frankly, Mr. Chung, you don't look like the kind of a man who would watch it."

Chung smiled. "When my grandchildren were in the house the television was always tuned to *Jumbo and Junior*."

"It was a silly show, but fun," Gaffney said. "The old Mutt and Jeff principle — one big fat guy and a little short guy. We'd have been good for a couple more seasons at least if Jumbo hadn't got vain and gone on a diet. When he wasn't fat any more he wasn't funny either. I tried working alone for a while, but it

didn't click. I was getting pretty hungry by the time I caught on with Boots Malloy."

The woman's voice rose again in the dressing room.

"The lady, I assume, is Mrs. Malloy," Chung said.

"That's Isobel, all right," Gaffney confirmed. "She gets on Boots pretty hard sometimes, but he's not about to cross her. She writes his stuff, you know."

"So I have heard. Marriage must have its problems for people in show business, even under the best of conditions."

"Personally, I wouldn't know," Gaffney said. "I've never been married."

"It could be that you made a wise choice."

"Choice nothing. What kind of a woman would marry a little creep like me?"

"Perhaps you underestimate yourself."

"I was engaged once," Gaffney said, looking at something far away.

"Yes?"

The little man shook his head and grinned. "She changed her mind. I guess I didn't measure up. That's a short-person joke."

The door to Malloy's dressing room was jerked open and a sharp-faced, angular woman swept past them with barely a glance.

"Isobel Malloy," Gaffney said as she pushed through the door leading to the show room.

A few seconds later a pale,

perspiring man with haunted eyes emerged, glancing down the hallway as though to assure himself that the woman was gone. "Married twelve years," he said, "and believe it or not, we still hold hands. If we didn't, we'd kill each other."

Gaffney said, "Boots, this is Inspector Chung from the police in Honolulu."

"Hiya, Inspector. You here to arrest me for telling bad jokes?"

"As yet there is no such law," Chung smiled, "but from what people tell me, you would be innocent even if there were."

"Well, thanks. I think. What can I do for you, Mr. Chung?"

"I am working with Lt. Kagle on the death last Monday of Joe Romo."

"Have they arrested anybody?"

"Not yet. I was hoping you might be able to add to my small store of information."

"I doubt it, but ask away if you want to. I've got a few minutes before I have to start getting ready. Lou, how about rustling me a bloody Mary from the bar."

"Sure, Boots," Gaffney said. "Can I bring you something, Mr. Chung?"

"Thank you, no."

Chung walked with Boots Malloy back into the dressing room. The comedian pushed the curtain aside and seated himself before the makeup mirror. Chung sat facing him on a couch that stood against one wall.

"Were you well acquainted with Mr. Romo?" Chung asked.

"Not really. I did two weeks to open his club a year ago, but I haven't seen him since."

"You did not see him here before his death?"

"No. I just got into town Monday myself to open that night at the Oasis. I didn't even know Romo was here until somebody told me he'd been murdered."

"Your first show began at eight o'clock Monday?"

"Just like always. Are you asking me for an alibi?"

"It would be helpful to know your whereabouts, if you would not mind telling me."

"Why should I? I spent the afternoon in my suite with Isobel. We had an early dinner, about five o'clock, then I came down here and played gin with Lou Gaffney. That would be from about six until show time. At the end of the first show I heard somebody was shot over in the bungalows. I didn't know until later it was Romo."

Malloy leaned close to the mirror and grimaced, examining his teeth. He turned his head to one side, then the other, dabbing at his graying temples with a sponge ball dipped in brown dye. "I'll give you odds some broad did him in," he said.

"Why do you think that?"

"The kind of a-guy Romo was, I'm surprised he lasted this long. I never saw him without two or

three honeys hanging onto him. He used to treat them like dirt. I never understood what the broads saw in him, but he could sure make them sit up and speak."

Lou Gaffney returned carrying a red drink in a tall glass. Malloy took it from his hand with a grateful sigh and drained half of it. To Chung he said, "If there's nothing more, I'd better get out and check cues with the band."

"You have been most generous with your time," Chung said. "Perhaps we will talk again later."

"Come see the show," Malloy said. "Lou will fix you up with tickets."

"I plan to do that," said Chung, "if not this evening, then certainly tomorrow."

"Good," Malloy said. He finished his drink and went off in the direction his wife had taken earlier.

"How did you like Boots?" Gaffney asked, retrieving Malloy's empty glass from the dressing table.

"He was very cordial. Not as funny as I had been led to believe."

"Boots saves the jokes for out front, Mr. Chung. There are all kinds of comics. Some are 'on' all the time, others go into a shell. I don't think I've ever known one who was truly happy. You go to any gathering of show business people, and the guys who are

laughing and kidding around are the dramatic actors. The comics look like they're at a funeral. Speaking of which, does your being here have anything to do with the shooting the other night? I know Joe Romo was from Honolulu."

"You are quite right," Chung said. "To clear up the picture in my mind I have been imposing on people by asking where they were at the time Mr. Romo was killed."

"Well, I can account for two of us. Boots Malloy and I were right here playing gin from six o'clock until he went on for the first show. It helps Boots relax, especially when I let him win a few bucks like Monday. I want to tell you it takes some doing to lose to that man."

"Mr. Malloy is not an adept card player?"

"Boots Malloy has got to be one of the worst gamblers in the world. If somebody was making book today on World War Two, Boots would get down on Germany. Don't tell him I said so, though; he likes to think he's quite a sport."

"Your statements will remain confidential," Chung assured him.

"As a matter of fact, that's what Isobel was chewing him out for just now — gambling. I suppose you heard."

"It would have been difficult not to."

The square-shouldered figure of Lt. Kagle appeared in the door-

way. "Our girl's here, Sammy," he said. "Dallasandro is letting us use his office. She's up there now waiting for us."

"Thank you for your time, Mr. Gaffney," Chung said to the little man. "My grandchildren will be impressed to learn that I have met one half of *Jumbo and Junior*."

"Any time," Gaffney grinned, and gave the policemen a wave as they walked out into the hallway.

V

KAGLE AND CHUNG walked back out through the show room and across the casino, where action was picking up as evening approached. They crossed the small lobby into an alcove where there were several offices. Like all Las Vegas hotels, the Oasis was laid out so that to get from one point to another you always had to go through the casino, hopefully to drop a few dollars in passing.

"Jewell Barr is a little uptight about being questioned," Kagle said. "If she balks, do you want to use the good-guy-bad-guy routine? I presume you use that in Hawaii, too."

"The technique, I believe, is international," Chung said. "If you feel it will encourage more truthful answers from Miss Barr it may be worth trying."

"I guess there's no question about who takes which part," Kagle grinned. "With that innocent face of yours nobody is

going to believe you're the bad guy."

Chung returned the smile. "I will take that as a compliment," he said, "although in the past adversaries have remarked on my resemblance to Dr. Fu Manchu."

Jewell Barr paced the carpet in front of Dallasandro's desk, taking rapid little puffs on a thin cigarette. She was a tall girl with long, smooth-muscled legs encased in net stockings. The remainder of her costume was a sequined black bikini. She snapped her head around with an angry little exclamation when the detectives entered.

"Good evening, Miss Barr. I am Sammy Chung of the Honolulu police."

"What's the idea, anyway?" the girl said. "This other one wouldn't tell me anything."

"Some routine questions," Chung said.

"Am I under arrest or something? Should I have a lawyer?" Under the girl's makeup a little worry line etched itself in her brow.

"No one is under arrest," Chung told her. "Of course you have the right to have a lawyer present if you wish."

"Who needs it? I haven't done anything. I just hope this doesn't take long. I'm due on the floor at eight."

"You are a dancer, Miss Barr?" Chung asked, knowing the answer.

"Thank you very much, but I'm a cocktail waitress. There was a time when I had bigger ambitions, but ... ah, who cares about that?"

"It would seem premature for you to abandon your hopes for a theatrical career, Miss Barr. Obtaining a degree in dramatic arts is an accomplishment in itself."

"How did you know about that?"

"I recently discussed you with a mutual acquaintance in Honolulu, Judge Henry Tobin."

"Judge Tobin?" the girl repeated uncertainly.

"Father of a close friend of yours, Miss Amy Tobin."

"Amy and I were friends in school," Jewell said carefully.

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"Oh not for ... not since we left school."

The girl's evasiveness was Kagle's cue to start being the bad guy.

"Damn it, Sammy," he growled, "she's lying, and we both know it."

"It's the truth, I tell you," Jewell said, but without conviction.

"I'm going to take her downtown. Maybe her answers will straighten out down there."

"You can't do that, I have to go to work," the girl said.

"Oh, can't I?" Kagle took a step toward her, but Sammy

Chung held up a hand to stop him.

"It would be a pity to have to take Miss Barr to the station," Chung said. "The paperwork alone would keep her there for many hours. I am sure she will tell us what she can without the need for such unpleasant formalities."

"Don't count on it," Kagle said. "I know her type. The only thing these babies understand is to get leaned on a little."

"How would you know anything about a girl trying to make a go of it on her own in this town," Jewell flared at the lieutenant.

"That did it. I'm taking her in."

"Before making that decision, Lieutenant, would you give Miss Barr and myself a few minutes alone?"

With a show of great reluctance Kagle said, "Okay, I'll give you ten minutes, but just out of professional courtesy to you, Sammy. I don't think we'll get anything out of this one until we get her downtown." With that, the detective spun on his heel and stomped out of the office, slamming the door behind him.

"Would he really do that, Mr. Chung, take me in?" the girl asked, her mascaraed eyes wide and frightened now.

"Lt. Kagle is a determined man."

"I can't afford that. It's hard enough to get work in this town, but with any kind of police trouble

the hotels and casinos won't touch you."

"Perhaps the lieutenant will soften his position if you can remember something that might help us locate Miss Tobin."

"Amy is my friend," Jewell said. "I wouldn't want to get her in trouble."

"I suspect, Miss Barr, that you know your friend is already in trouble. Your silence, even though it stems from loyalty, can only worsen her situation."

Jewell chewed her lower lip, and her eyes darted about the room as though she hoped to find some hidden escape. Then she turned to face Chung directly and the words tumbled out.

"Yes, I've seen Amy. She came to my apartment Monday night. She asked me if she could stay there, said she was in some kind of trouble but wouldn't tell me what it was. She said as long as I didn't know the details I wouldn't be involved in it."

"Did you suspect what the trouble was?"

"Not at the time, but I figured it out fast enough the next day when I heard about Joe Romo being shot."

"You knew Mr. Romo?"

"Only what Amy wrote me in her letters. She was crazy in love with the guy for some reason. He was a married man and a heel, but all Amy wanted was to be with him. I guess he must have tried to brush her off and she couldn't

take it. Poor Amy liked to act as if she knew her way around, but she never had any experience at all. How do you figure her falling for a creep like that?"

"Woman in love like unattentive shopper," Chung observed, "sometimes selects inferior merchandise. Is Miss Tobin at your apartment now?"

"Will she be arrested?"

"Since she is a prime murder suspect, such action is probable."

"Will it have to be that awful man who picks her up?"

"I will ask Lt. Kagle to allow me to go in after her. Since I am an old friend of Amy's father, I think he will agree."

"She's at my place now," Jewell said in a voice that was barely audible. "It's number 309 in the Sunburst Apartments. That's on Charleston Boulevard and Seventh. Do you want my key?"

"It would be helpful."

From the patent leather bag she had set on Dallasandro's desk Jewell Barr took a key case. She removed one of the keys and handed it to Chung.

"I feel like a traitor," she said. "Amy came to me for help, and here I am turning her in."

"Friendship," said Chung, "like a gift through the mail, is sometimes delivered in deceptive wrapper."

"Yes, well, I only hope Amy understands. Can I go to work now?"

"Of course. Thank you so much for your help."

Chung watched as the girl scooped her purse protectively under her arm and hurried out the door. He had a strong impression she was not telling all she knew. However, to push her further at this time would be a mistake. More important now was getting to her apartment and Amy Tobin.

Lt. Kagle came back into the room. "How did it go?"

"Most satisfactorily. You were a very convincing bad guy, lieutenant."

"Just good acting," Kagle grinned. "At heart I'm a pussycat. What did you find out about Amy Tobin?"

"She is at Miss Barr's apartment — a place called the Sunburst."

"I know the one, it's just three miles from here. Let's go pick her up."

"Lieutenant, I would like to ask as a favor that when we get there I go in alone."

Kagle rubbed his jaw, spilling ashes from the ever-present cigarette that seemed to grow from his hand. "It's not standard procedure," he said, "but as long as you know the girl personally, and there's not much chance she'll be dangerous, go ahead."

Chung stopped at the registration desk long enough to check into the hotel and have his bags sent up. Then the two policemen walked out to Kagle's car.

VI

THE SUNBURST APARTMENTS occupied a new three-story building with imitation fieldstone facing along the front and stucco behind. A golden sun face with rays emanating from it watched over the entrance.

Lt. Kagle steered the Plymouth into the curb and parked. "I'll wait here," he said. "Give a yell if you need help."

"It is unlikely that assistance will be required in apprehending the young lady," Chung said, "but your offer is appreciated." He stepped from the car and headed into the apartment.

The building was a square-doughnut shape with a swimming pool in the center and a three-tiered outdoor walkway with doors of the apartments opening onto it. The effect was disturbingly like the interior of a prison.

Chung climbed to the third story and found the door with metal numbers 309 attached. He inserted the key Jewell Barr had given him and turned it in the lock. He eased the door open and stepped into the room. The furniture was lightweight and spare with cushions strewn about the floor. Abstract prints brightened the walls.

"Who is it?" called a girl's voice from beyond an open doorway. "Jewell, is that you?"

Chung stepped to the doorway

and saw it led into a small bedroom. Standing by the bureau was a blonde girl in a blue silk dress. Her face had a haunted look, and there were dark smudges beneath her eyes.

"Hello, Amy," said Sammy Chung.

"Mr. Chung! What are you doing here?"

"I talked to your father in Honolulu yesterday. He asked me to help if you were in trouble."

The girl pressed one hand to her mouth and bit down hard on a knuckle. She fought for composure, but lost control with a great racking sob. She ran forward to Chung who put his arms around her and let the girl sob out her tension against his chest.

"Oh, Mr. Chung," the girl said brokenly when she could speak again, "I'm so frightened and miserable. I didn't know what to do. I'm so glad you're here."

"I, too, am relieved to have found you," Chung said.

"What shall I do?" she sobbed.

"As a policeman I must ask you to come with me. As a friend I advise that you communicate with your father as soon as possible."

"Are you taking me to jail?" Amy asked, her eyes growing terrified.

"Lt. Kagle of the Las Vegas police is waiting for us," said Chung. "He will want to take you to the station for questioning."

"Will you be there?"

"You have my promise."

"All right, Mr. Chung, I'm ready to go," Amy said. "What I feel most right now is relief. Hiding here these last three days has been the most terrible experience of my life."

"It is well known that the darkest hour of the night is followed by the light of dawn," said Chung.

The girl smiled weakly and, leaning on Chung's arm, accompanied him out of the apartment and down to the waiting car.

Lt. Kagle, taking his cue from Chung, was silent during the ride to the station. There, after Amy was informed officially of her rights, she was allowed to make a telephone call to her father in Honolulu. When their conversation ended Amy handed the phone to Chung.

"He wants to speak to you," she said.

"Sammy, thank God you found her," came the judge's voice.

"The task was not so very difficult," said Chung.

"Tell me frankly, how does it look for her?"

"At this moment, not good. However, there are avenues of the case still unexplored."

"Will you be able to stay on it?"

"As long as friendly relations are maintained with Las Vegas authorities. Lt. Kagle here has been most cooperative."

"I'm glad to hear that. I'll call a

friend of mine in Los Angeles right away — an attorney named Victor Hammond. He should be there by tomorrow."

"We will await his arrival."

"And Sammy... thanks again."

"It is nothing, old friend," said Chung. He replaced the instrument and turned to Kagle.

"The girl won't talk until her lawyer gets here," said the lieutenant.

"Not an unwise decision. Her father informs me the attorney will arrive tomorrow."

"I'll have to book her," Kagle said.

"On what charge?"

"Suspicion of homicide."

"Is it possible to delay booking until we have talked with Miss Tobin and her attorney?"

"I can hold her up to 48 hours without charging her, but what's the point?"

"Like an iceberg," said Chung, "much of this case remains beneath the surface."

"Oriental wisdom?"

"Occidentals would call it a hunch. Our conversations so far with people connected to Romo have raised as many questions as they have answered. If the situation is unchanged tomorrow you can still bring such charges as you find suitable."

"All right," Kagle agreed. "Who am I to go against an oriental hunch? What are your plans for tonight?"

"Immediate plans call for return

to hotel where I will indulge in a good night's sleep, hoping to refresh weary brain cells. If you are available in the morning, perhaps we might visit the scene of the crime."

"I'll be available," Kagle said. "Come on, I'll give you a lift back to the Oasis."

VII

THE NEXT MORNING Sammy Chung, dressed in a fresh white suit, was enjoying a breakfast of ripe cantaloupe, basted eggs, English muffin, and green tea. Lt. Kagle strode into the Oasis restaurant wearing either the same rumpled outfit as the day before, or one that was identical down to the last wrinkle.

"Good morning, Lieutenant," said Chung, "Have you had your breakfast?"

"My stomach rejects all forms of solid food before noon," Kagle said with a grimace.

"A pity. I will be with you in a moment."

Kagle dropped into the chair across from Chung and lit a fresh cigarette. "I had a call from the girl's attorney, Victor Hammond in L.A. He says he'll be here at noon."

"Excellent," said Chung. "I will appreciate being present when Miss Tobin is questioned."

"Don't worry," Kagle said. "I talked to the chief last night about all the help you've given us on

this, and he called Honolulu. You are now officially assigned to work with us until the case is closed. Of course, that may be only a few more hours."

"Possibly," Chung said. "However, unexpected pathways may reveal themselves before the day is out."

Chung finished his tea and signed the check while Kagle smoked another cigarette. "Shall we now visit the bungalow where Mr. Romo met his fate?"

"It's behind the hotel, across the golf course. We can drive around, or we can walk if you want to."

"A walk in the fresh air of morning sounds inviting," said Chung.

The two policemen left the hotel by a rear exit and strolled around the outer edge of the golf course, watching several foursomes out on the fairway.

"Do you play golf, Sammy?" Kagle asked as they walked.

"I have never tried the game, but hope to someday."

"Not me. I can't think of anything more ridiculous than a bunch of grown men trying to knock a ball into a hole with a stick."

"Most of men's pastimes look ridiculous to the disinterested eye. Including, I imagine, making love."

"You've got something there. Those are the bungalows up ahead. Romo was in the one on this side, the others were empty."

There's a gate in this wall opposite the bungalows that we can go through."

Chung and Kagle continued along the low wall that separated the fairway from the driveway that ran in front of the bungalows. A puff of wind off the desert brought the promise of a hot day to come.

Kagle unlatched the gate and stepped through. Chung followed, and they crossed to the first of the bungalows. As they crossed the lawn Chung stooped to pluck a bit of grass.

"*Stenotaphrum*," he said.

"What?"

"St. Augustine grass, such as was found on the murder weapon."

"Oh ... yeah ..." Kagle said, but his attention was on the door of the bungalow. With a grunt of surprise he hurried forward.

"Something wrong?" said Chung.

Kagle reached down and seized the knob. "The police seal has been broken," he said. "Somebody's been in here."

"No guard was posted?"

"Only until the crime lab people were finished inside. We took the patrolman off the door last night, but planned to keep the place sealed for a few days."

"So the break-in must have occurred sometime last night."

"Right. Let's take a look inside."

Kagle pushed the door open carefully, and Chung stood at his

shoulder to look into the bungalow. The living room seemed undisturbed except for the writing table at the far end. The single drawer had been pulled out and the contents dumped on the table top. The policemen entered the room and crossed to the disordered table. They stood looking down without touching anything.

"Is something missing?" Chung asked. "Or something added?"

Kagle studied the litter. There was not much. Some hotel stationery, a magazine advertising the current shows in Las Vegas, matchbooks from the Camel Room, and a scattering of paper clips and rubber bands. A dark stain across the table top and on the rug behind it testified to the violence of the previous Monday.

"As far as I can tell nothing's been taken," Kagle said.

"Not an ordinary burglary," Chung observed.

"No, not with a police seal on the door. Somebody was after something special. I doubt that he found it, since anything that could be considered evidence we took along."

"An intruder unfamiliar with police procedure might assume that some piece of incriminating evidence was still here," said Chung.

"Right. I think it would be a good idea if we went downtown and had another look at what we took out of here."

"I concur, Lieutenant. The thief's failure to find what he was looking for may bring to light new evidence that might have been overlooked."

"One other thing, Sammy, there's at least one person we know did not break in here last night."

"That had occurred to me. Lodging in County Jail provides excellent alibi for Amy Tobin."

A few minutes later Chung and the Lieutenant were in Kagle's office with the evidence from Romo's bungalow spread out on the desk before them.

"Let's see what we have," Kagle said. "The contents of his wallet in this pile — identification, credit cards, two hundred dollars in cash. Here's a letter from Frank Dallasandro to Romo's Honolulu address giving him a list of the acts booked at the Oasis through the summer. An invitation to a cocktail party this Saturday. Looks like that's one party he'll miss."

"What about the sheet of ledger paper with dates, figures, and the name pencilled at the top."

"This might be something we can use. Apparently it's a tab somebody named Leonard Markewitz ran up with Romo. He's signed it here across the bottom."

"Have you turned up anything on this Mr. Markewitz?"

"No, but to tell the truth, we haven't pursued the thing very far

in that direction. The murder gun was our hottest trail, and that led to Judge Tobin in Honolulu and eventually to his daughter."

"Considering the forced entry into the late Mr. Romo's bungalow, it may pay to learn more about Leonard Markewitz." Chung leaned closer to examine the ledger sheet. "Interesting to note that all dates of entries are from a two-week period just one year ago. Figures add up to 88,000. Assuming these are dollars, it would appear that Mr. Markewitz became deeply indebted to Romo in a short period of time."

"That's possible," Kagle said. "From what you tell me Romo had a heavy gambling operation going in the islands."

"It is also an interesting coincidence that the first two letters of the name are the same as in the name of one of our friends at the Oasis."

Kagle spelled the name silently, then his eyebrows arched in surprise. "Malloy?"

"It was just one year ago that Malloy spent two weeks in Honolulu for the opening of Romo's club there. A wise policeman views coincidence with much skepticism."

"I can check it out in a hurry," Kagle said, reaching for the telephone. He dialed a number, then spoke into the mouthpiece. "Is Wally Pickett around?"

Covering the instrument with

his hand, he said to Chung, "Wally's the show business editor for the *Mirror*. He'll have the dope if anybody does." At a chattering sound in the earpiece Kagle returned his attention to the telephone.

"Hello, Wally, Bert Kagle. You know Boots Malloy, comic out at the Oasis? Is that his real name? Check it, would you?" After a pause of some thirty seconds the chattering in the earpiece resumed.

"Is that so?" Kagle said. "And that's still his legal name? Thanks, Wally."

The lieutenant cradled the phone and looked across at Chung. "Guess what. Boots Malloy's legal name is Leonard Markewitz."

Chung nodded, unsurprised.

"I think we'd better go out and have another talk with Mr. Markewitz/Malloy."

"That might prove most enlightening," Chung agreed.

As they started out the door the policemen were met by a distinguished looking man with an attache case under his arm.

"Excuse me," he said, "I'm looking for Lt. Kagle."

"I'm, Kagle."

"My name is Victor Hammond. I'm representing Miss Tobin."

"We weren't expecting you until noon."

"I was able to catch an earlier flight. I have already talked to my client while you were out this

morning, and she is prepared to make a statement."

"What do you think, Sammy," Kagle asked, "can Malloy wait?"

"Miss Tobin's statement may provide us with additional questions for Mr. Malloy," said Chung.

"All right," Kagle said to the attorney, "bring your client in. I'll send for a stenographer and get somebody from the district attorney's office."

VIII

IT WAS ELEVEN O'CLOCK by the time everyone got together in the interrogation room down the hall from Kagle's office. Chung and the lieutenant sat at one side of a table facing Amy Tobin and Victor Hammond. At the head of the table sat a young assistant district attorney. He was one of the new breed — sideburns, moustache, gold-rimmed glasses, and a mod cut suit. At the foot of the table sat a male stenographer who maintained an expression of professional boredom.

Kagle noted the date, the time, and the names of those present for the stenographer, then he spoke to Amy.

"Miss Tobin, is this to be a completely voluntary statement on your part?"

"Yes," Amy answered. She looked pale and tired, but her eye was steady and she held herself erect.

"Very well," Kagle said, "when you have completed your statement I or Mr. Chung or Mr. Ungar, representing the district attorney, may ask you questions. You may answer these or not, as you choose, or you may act on the advice of your counsel, Mr. Hammond. Is this understood and acceptable?"

Amy glanced at Hammond. The attorney nodded his agreement.

"I understand, Lieutenant," she said. "Where do you want me to begin?"

"Why not start with your arrival in Las Vegas?"

Amy placed her folded hands before her on the tabletop and began to speak in a low voice. "I arrived at five o'clock Monday on a flight from Los Angeles. I'd spent two days there looking for Joe ... Mr. Romo. When he left Honolulu he didn't tell anybody where he was going. Or maybe he just left word not to tell me. Anyway, I took a flight to Los Angeles and looked up everybody there I could think of who might know where Joe was. Finally I learned he was here in Las Vegas staying at the Oasis.

"Maybe I ought to tell you what my state of mind was at the time. Joe Romo and I had been ... well, having an affair is the only honest way to put it. He told me, and I believed him, that there was no love any more between him and his wife. Joe said, or maybe I

inferred, that just as soon as he was free of his wife we could be married. Then suddenly they separated and he was free of her. I suppose I should have felt some compassion for Nancy — she met Joe at his club a year ago and fell in love with him, just the way I did — but all I could feel was glad that she was out of the picture. I went to Joe then to be with him, and I was stunned when he rejected me. Not gently, but in very plain language he said he had other things on his mind and couldn't be bothered with me. I was so humiliated I wanted to die. I'd had a fight with my father about Joe, and I was ashamed to go home and admit I'd been a fool.

"I took a hotel room in Honolulu and stayed there crying for two days. Finally I began to think if I could just see Joe once more and talk to him, everything would be all right between us again. That's when I learned he'd flown to the mainland. Without thinking, I followed him.

"When I landed in Las Vegas I left my bag in a locker at the airport. No, first I took my gun out of it, then I checked my bag. I took a taxi to the Oasis and asked at the desk for Joe Romo. They told me he had one of the bungalows in the back. The man at the desk offered to call him, but I didn't want to give Joe a chance to prepare for me. I walked around to the bungalow."

"Excuse me," Chung put in. "What route did you follow to reach Romo's bungalow?"

"I walked out on the street and around the block. It was a long block, but I'm a strong walker and it only took me a few minutes to get there. It was a quarter to seven when I rang the bell and Joe answered. He let me in, then went back and sat down at a writing table. I made a fool of myself pleading with him to take me back. He refused. I took the gun from my purse. That was supposed to be a dramatic touch that would make him understand how serious I was. He only laughed at me.

"The next thing I knew I was pulling the trigger and the gun was firing. Joe cried out and fell to the floor. I saw the blood, and that's when I came to my senses. I was horrified at what I'd done. I ran out of the bungalow and across the lawn to the driveway. It was then that somebody saw me."

Chung and Lt. Kagle leaned forward suddenly at Amy's words. The young district attorney eyed them closely.

"Somebody saw you?" Kagle asked in a tense voice. "Who saw you?"

"I don't know who it was. Whoever told you about seeing me come out of there. Someone *did* report seeing me?"

"Can you give us a description of the person you saw?" Kagle asked.

"No, I can't. The light, what there was of it, was behind him. I can't even be sure it was a man. All I saw was a silhouette. The silhouette of a head, actually. He was walking toward me along the wall that runs along the edge of the golf course. He stopped and turned to look at me as I ran across the lawn. I'm sure he saw me."

Kagle scratched an entry in his notebook, then looked up at Amy. "Go on, please."

"There isn't much more to tell. I ran back the way I had come, expecting someone to stop me at any moment. I didn't meet anybody until I was back on the Strip. There I hailed a taxi. When the driver asked me where I wanted to go, my mind went blank for a moment. Then I thought of Jewell Barr. She was a close friend of mine when we were in school, and the only person I know in Las Vegas. I gave her address to the driver and he took me there."

"What time did you get to Miss Barr's apartment?" Kagle asked.

"I'm not sure. It wasn't 7:30 yet, I'm sure of that. Maybe a quarter past seven. Everything had happened in just a very few minutes, though it seemed much longer. Jewell wasn't home when I got there. Somehow, that made it seem all the more urgent that I see her. I waited in front of her building for maybe an hour to see if she would come home. I didn't know then that she worked nights."

Or at the Oasis. I began to worry that someone would get suspicious of me standing out on the street, so I walked back to the Strip and took a cab downtown. I went to a movie and sat through a double feature. When I went back to Jewell's apartment and she still wasn't home, I just sort of collapsed. I sat down on the steps there and cried. I just hugged my knees and put my head down and cried until I must have fallen into a kind of sleep. At a little after three in the morning Jewell came home from work and found me. I told her I was in trouble and needed a place to stay for a while."

"And you stayed in Miss Barr's apartment two days?" Kagle asked.

"Yes. I never went out at all until Mr. Chung came yesterday. And I never told Jewell about shooting Joe Romo. She only let me stay there out of friendship, and I don't want her to get in any trouble for helping me." Amy dropped her eyes to the table. "That's all," she said.

Kagle said, "Would you like to take a short break, Miss Tobin?"

"No, thank you. I'd rather get this over with as soon as possible."

"I can understand that." Kagle checked his notes. "How many times did you fire at Romo?"

"I — I'm not sure. Is it important?"

"It could be."

Amy pinched the bridge of her nose and frowned in thought. "Let me see. Three times, I think it was. Yes, there were three shots. I'm not sure that all of the shots hit him, but I'm certain I fired three times."

A shudder ran through Amy's body, and Victor Hammond leaned toward her.

"Are you sure you want to continue with this now?" the lawyer asked.

"Yes, yes, I'll be all right."

Kagle resumed his questioning. "Did you wipe your fingerprints from anything you might have touched — the front door, the desk, the gun?"

"No, no, I didn't do anything like that. I wasn't thinking clearly enough."

"Do you remember dropping the gun?" asked Sammy Chung.

"Well, no, not distinctly. I seem to remember it was still in my hand when I turned to run out the door. It wasn't until I was out on the street running away from the bungalow that I discovered it was missing."

"Were you carrying the pistol in your hand when you entered Romo's bungalow?"

"No, I'm sure about that. The gun was in my purse, and I didn't take it out until Joe was seated at the table and I was standing across from him."

For the next hour and a half Lt. Kagle continued to question Amy on her statement, leading her over

the same ground repeatedly without turning up any significant discrepancies in her story. His tone was respectful, but persistent. Amy, though she clearly showed the strain of her ordeal, answered all questions in a firm voice, meeting the lieutenant's eyes with her own.

Sammy Chung took no further part in the questioning. He sat impassively, his eyes narrowed, listening and digesting every word and nuance.

Paul Ungar, the assistant district attorney, listened with a hard intensity. From time to time he wrote something on the yellow legal pad he brought with him.

Finally Kagle said, "Thank you, Miss Tobin, I think that will do it for now."

Victor Hammond rose from his chair and helped Amy to her feet. He said, "Can we get together to talk about what charges will be filed, Lieutenant?"

"I'll be in my office in a few minutes," Kagle said. "Meet me there."

Hammond nodded and led Amy out of the room.

Kagle closed the door behind Hammond and turned to the assistant district attorney. "What do you think, Paul?"

Ungar tapped a pencil against his teeth several times before he spoke. "There's no way you'll get Murder One. Even manslaughter is doubtful without more evidence."

"What about the confession?"

"I don't know. She seems to be telling the truth, but it just doesn't add up. What's this about a witness, anyway?"

"I wish I knew. To tell you the truth, Paul, I've got my doubts right now that she even killed the guy."

"Do you mean you're not going to press the case?" Ungar asked.

"No, I didn't say that. "Dam-

mit, she did confess to shooting Romo. We've got to book her for something. What do you think, Sammy?"

"I would agree that too many unexplained pieces of Miss Tobin's statement do not fit a picture of her murdering Romo. Most importantly, who was the witness, and why did he not come forward? Secondly, we have the location of the gun. It was found on the floor a few feet from the body. If Miss Tobin dropped it there after carrying it inside in her purse, where did the bit of grass on the trigger guard come from?"

"Then there's the fact that she says she fired only three shots," Kagle put in.

"Correct. No abacus is needed to determine that one bullet in Romo's brain and three in the wall add up to four."

Kagle nodded in agreement. "I think she's telling it straight. She really believes she blew the guy up."

"It would certainly appear so," said Chung. "It seems you and I have more work to do."

Kagle spoke to the assistant district attorney. "Paul, what can you hold the girl on with what we've got?"

Ungar ran a finger across his moustache, first one side, then the other. "Is there any problem about whether she gets out on bail or not?"

"I hardly think she'd skip, do you, Sammy?"

"Highly unlikely," Chung agreed.

Don't miss the exciting conclusion of DEATH ON THE STRIP in next month's MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

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"Okay," Ungar said, "we'll go for assault with a deadly weapon. With her statement plus the gun I think we can make that stick if we have to."

"Good enough," Kagle said. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "Hey, I almost forgot what we were starting out to do, Sammy. We had some business at the Oasis with Mr. Boots Malloy/Markewitz."

"Quite so," said Chung. "With the added details learned from Miss Tobin's testimony, the interview with Mr. Malloy could prove most enlightening."

TRACY' LAST PARTY

by William L. Fieldhouse

Tracy Collins Was the Most Beautiful WAC Stationed at Bradford Barracks. Who Would Want to Stick a Knife in Her Beautiful Body? Somebody Did — and It Was Up to Major Lansing of the CID to Find the Killer!

UNITED STATES ARMY personnel stationed in West Germany are restricted by regulation from living off base unless they meet certain requirements generally determined by their post and unit commanders.

However, some unauthorized enlisted men manage to maintain quarters off post even though German apartments are expensive and the devaluated American dollar isn't worth nearly as many *Deutsch Marks* as it once was. Specialist Fourth Class Greg Donner was such an individual. He rented an apartment in a building a few blocks from Bradford Barracks.

Donner's place consisted of a sitting room, a bedroom, a kitch-enette, a bathroom and a closet.

Donner often had guests in his apartment. He usually had parties on the weekends, and that Saturday night was no exception.

Private First Class Luiz Sanchez sat on the pillows, sipping from a beer can as he waited for his turn with the brass hash-pipe being passed around the room. Sanchez was a wiry young man, less than five-and-a-half-feet tall, but his strikingly handsome dark Latin face compensated for any lack his physical size may have created.

Drinking scotch from a Dixie cup, Specialist Fourth Class Chester Rubin was already intoxicated. The lanky black man grinned stupidly as his date for the evening, PFC Nancy Jones, passed the pipe to him. The young

WAC's Afro seemed to move with an eerie life of its own as the pulsating lights flickered across her slowly shaking head.

The woman beside Donner was named Tracy Collins. She was a Spec. Four clerk assigned to Charlie Battery's S-one. Tracy was the most attractive and desirable young WAC stationed at Bradford Barracks. She was a real beauty with cream-colored skin, pale blue eyes, high cheekbones and a ripe, full mouth. Chestnut-brown hair framed her lovely, smooth face. Her body matched her countenance. Although her bustline filled her orange T-shirt handsomely, her waist was trim and her legs encased in a tight pair of Levi's were long and shapely.

In a military environment, any woman will attract the interest of a large number of eager males, but every WAC at Bradford Barracks knew she was second choice to Tracy. Nancy didn't envy Tracy, however; she hated her.

Nancy was also aware of Chester's fleeting glances at Tracy. *He still wants that honky tramp,* Nancy thought grimly. Yet, she noticed his expression was a combination of desire and resentment. Sanchez gazed at her in a similiar manner, but his expression seemed to reveal more anger than longing.

Greg "Red" Donner had surprised everyone by inviting two of Tracy's former lovers to the party. *Absolutely freaky!* Of course, Red

was known for his weird sense of humor and sick practical jokes. He always had an ample supply of good booze and "righteous smokes," so they'd accepted the chance to attend the bash.

Tracy sat demurely, sipping from a can of diet cola. She never drank liquor and only smoked a little hash. Their host, "Red" Donner, who supplied liberal amounts of hashish and liquor, wasn't drinking much that night and hadn't taken a "hit" on the pipe since the party began.

"You afraid you might get some germs from us niggers?" Chester Rubin snorted sourly.

"Hell, no, man!" Donner replied, tilting his head back as he inhaled through his nose deeply. "There's enough smoke in this room for a real mellow high without sucking on the bowl."

Donner was a big man, whose nickname came from his dark red hair. His crimson moustache was well-waxed and curled up at the ends like cow-horns. He'd been bawled out for his hair length due to violation of dress-regulation, but he defied his superiors and his red hair still touched the collar of his shirt.

Sanchez drew on the hash pipe slowly, smiling as he felt the smoke travel into his lungs and experienced the light-headed feeling of mild intoxication. He gazed up at the nearest centerfold tacked to the wall. He considered how dull his sex-life had become,

but he still grinned because he had some fantastic memories in that category. Tracy took the bowl. He glared at her, then shrugged as the high overwhelmed the anger.

Rubin walked unsteadily to the bedroom, staggered through it and entered the bathroom. *Damn!* Nancy thought. *He's gonna pass out before we get around to doing anything!* Her prediction was correct. Chester Rubin finished using the latrine, stumbled out and collapsed on the bed with a moan. The others soon heard him snoring loudly.

Half an hour later, the hash was all burned away. Sanchez consumed another beer as Donner removed the ashes and screen from the bowl of the pipe. Nancy wondered if the others would decide to have an orgy. After everyone smokes enough hashish, any sex partner is good enough.

Finishing yet another beer, Sanchez announced that he had to use the toilet. He swayed slightly as he moved through the bedroom to the latrine. Donner and Tracy smiled at each other. Tracy giggled. Nancy drank some scotch Rubin had deserted.

As the toilet flushed, Tracy rose, slung her large handbag over her shoulder and walked to the bedroom. Nancy heard the bathroom door open. She wished Donner would hurry up and refill the hash pipe. Nancy wanted to get high enough to forget Chester Rubin, the Army and cheap white

trollops. Tracy opened her purse as she entered the bedroom.

Then she screamed and tumbled backward into the sitting room.

"Aw, knock it off!" Nancy muttered sourly.

Tracy fell on the pillows, butt first, then sprawled on her back, her eyes staring up at the ceiling, her mouth open in a silent gasp. Nancy saw the red stain under Tracy's breasts and the handle of a knife jutting from between her hands, tightly clasped to the crimson patch.

Nancy screamed, scrambling to her feet, her eyes bulging with terror.

Sanchez stood in the doorway of the bedroom, his mouth open as he stared at Tracy's still body. Donner dropped the hash pipe and rushed forward.

"Go get the cops!" he shouted as he pounced on Sanchez, swinging a fist into the Puerto Rican's face.

Nancy was too frightened to do anything but follow Donner's instructions. She bolted to the exit and ran into the corridor.

"Murder!" she screamed. "Help! Murder!"

A WHITE VOLKSWAGEN pulled up behind an assortment of vehicles parked in front of the *Furth Polizei Station*. A tall, slender man dressed in a green, class-A uniform of the United States Army emerged from the diminutive car. He pulled on a

service cap with a bill adorned with golden "scrambled eggs" as he scanned the MP jeeps, civilian automobiles and blue *Polizei* Volkswagens with red lights mounted on their roofs lined up in front of his car.

Entering the German police station, he discovered a number of military policemen arguing with the local cops. As neither the MPs nor the *Polizei* understood each others' language, confusion and frustration made the conversation worse.

"Excuse me, *entschuldigen*," he announced loudly. "I'm major Lansing from the Criminal Investigation Department."

Lansing spoke fluent German, which enabled him to learn both sides of the argument. The *Polizei* had been called to investigate a murder report at an apartment building. After arresting the suspect and removing the corpse, the cops discovered everyone involved were U.S. Army personnel from Bradford Barracks. Someone contacted the Military Police. When the MPs arrived an argument occurred concerning which law enforcement department had jurisdiction in the case.

"I've been assigned to investigate this homicide," Lansing told them. "So there's no doubt who's in charge of this case," he stated flatly. "*I am*."

A German policeman led Lansing into the cell block. They moved through the corridor until

they came to the barred door of a cell housing a single prisoner. He was a small, dark man who stared at the concrete walls in despair. Lansing thanked the *Polizist*. He listened to the cop's footsteps as he departed. When the door of the cell block closed: "PFC Sanchez?" Lansing inquired through the bars.

"What of it?" answered the man in the cell.

"I'm a homicide investigator from the CID."

"What the hell do you want me to do?" Sanchez sneered, his back still turned to Lansing as he continued to stare at the wall. "Stand at attention? Salute? Bow? Give you a nice full confession?"

"In the morning you'll be transported to a U.S. Army stockade," Lansing explained. "We finally managed to convince the *Polizei* that the military has jurisdiction in this case."

"Ask me if I give a damn," Sanchez muttered, still not bothering to turn around.

"I won't ask you that," Lansing replied. "I will ask you why you murdered Tracy Collins."

"I didn't kill her!" Sanchez said, scrambling from his bunk to rush to the bars.

Lansing was surprised to see the prisoner's face was covered with bruises. His nose was bent out of shape and one eye was swollen shut.

"Then what happened?" Lansing asked.

"What do you care, you pig-lifer?" Sanchez snarled. "You'll do your duty by running me in as the guilty one. Go ahead, you war-loving bastard. Fry the Latino for the crime. Isn't that the American way?"

"Are you finished?" Lansing inquired coldly. "Okay. Let me tell you my opinion of *you*. You're a cry-baby that doesn't have enough guts to face the world the way it is so you hobble around on twin crutches of alcohol and drugs. And don't give me any crap you were driven to it because you're a Puerto Rican in an Anglo army. Nobody drafted you, soldier, and there are thousands of minority group members in the service, but only a handful of jellyfish like you use that for an excuse to feel sorry for themselves and muddle up what little brains they have left."

"Then why are you even here?"

"Because I want to find a killer, and I'm not convinced you're it." The major shrugged. "So, convince me you're not, if you can."

"You won't believe me."

"What have you got to lose, Sanchez?"

"All right," the PFC sighed. "We were all drinking and passing around a bowl, you know, hashish. Anyway, I had to use the bathroom. I did my business and started to come out of the latrine, then I noticed I'd left the light on. So I went back into the bathroom and turned it off. That's when I heard Tracy scream. I ran out

and saw her lying on the floor in the sitting room with a knife sticking in her.

"Next thing I know 'Red' Donner is all over me, slugging away at my face and head until he knocked me out. When I came to, I found out he'd tied me up. The red-headed son of a bitch stood over me and called me a '*dirty spic murderer*' and a few other nice names. Then he punched and kicked me a little more while we waited for the cops to show up."

Lansing raised his right arm, revealing a thick white plaster cast on his wrist. He wished he could scratch under the cast. "When the police searched you they found a switchblade knife in your pocket. Do you always carry a knife?"

"Yeah, that was my switchblade, but I only carry *one* knife. I don't know where that one that was sticking in Tracy came from. I didn't kill her! I loved her!" Tears formed in his eyes. "We were gonna get back together. She told me so. Sure I was sore that she was still hanging around with Donner, but she was still going back with me. Why would I kill her?"

"People have been known to kill their loved ones. I often wonder how they treat their enemies," Lansing mused. "Specialist Rubin was in the bedroom with you. Do you think he saw what happened?"

"Chet was stoned, really zonked out. He hardly stirred even when

Tracy screamed."

"Now, for the big question," Lansing announced. "If you didn't kill Tracy, who did?"

Sanchez shook his head sadly.
"I don't know."

MAJOR CLIFFORD LANSING spent most of the following morning traveling to Ansbach to draw the 201 files of the five people that had attended Donner's fateful party, including the victim, Tracy Collins. Two-o-one files contain all pertinent information about Army personnel. Each file contains a record of an individual soldier's military service and a brief biography of his (or her) civilian life. Lansing had often discovered vital information and clues by studying 201 files in previous investigations.

Returning to his office at CID headquarters, Lansing was pleased to see Spec. Five Wendy Davis, his personal secretary, was preparing a pot of coffee. Lansing sometimes wondered why such an attractive and intelligent young woman had chosen to join the Army. As a career soldier himself, however, Lansing didn't feel he had any right to pry into her reasons for enlisting into the Armed Forces. He was simply grateful she'd been assigned to his office.

"Good morning, Wendy," he said. "Thanks for coming in on a Sunday."

"Certainly, sir," she replied. "Oh, Specialist Woods called and said he'll be up soon with his report."

"Very good." Lansing placed his briefcase full of 201s on his desk. He awkwardly removed his uniform jacket using only his left hand. The cast made pulling off the right sleeve difficult.

He sat down behind his desk to begin reading the records as the door swung open. Major Conglose appeared in the doorway. Conglose was a short, round-shouldered man with a receding hairline and a perpetually sour personality. His disgruntled expression was accented by constant squinting due to the fact that Conglose, for some vain reason known only to himself, seldom wore the glasses his myopic eyes sorely needed.

"Lansing, I just spoke to General Clayton," Conglose announced.

"I spoke with him myself last night, Major," Lansing said.

"I know." Conglose frowned. "He tells me you haven't closed your investigation of the WAC that was murdered last night."

"That's correct, sir."

"But it's obvious who the killer is. Two eyewitnesses saw the murder. The German police arrested the man and they're transferring him into our custody. The homicide is an open-and-shut case. The rest of this investigation belongs to me."

"Oh? How's that, Major?"

"I am in charge of narcotics investigation, Lansing. There's reason to suspect those enlisted men were using drugs that night. The punk that stabbed the girl to death was probably spaced out on something at the time."

"Although I realize you are the senior field-grade officer," Lansing said, "I also know that a homicide investigation has priority over narcotics. I am not going to close my investigation at this time, Major."

Before Conglose could protest, a light rapping of knuckles on the doorway behind him made him gasp and spin around to stare at a tall heavy-set man dressed in a white smock.

"Didn't mean to scare you, sir," SP6 Woods said without smiling, but his dark eyes revealed his amusement.

"Come in, Woody," Lansing urged. "Maybe Major Conglose should hear the results of your autopsy as well."

"Sure thing, sir," Woods replied, consulting a clipboard as he continued: "The victim was a nineteen-year-old, white, female. Death was the result of a single puncture wound, caused by a knife driven directly into her heart. No indication of a struggle. The only bruises were on her backside and a small lump at the back of her head, which probably occurred when she fell."

"Wonderful," Conglose mut-

tered. "We can use that for the trial."

"I also have the lab report, sir," Woods said, directing his attention at Lansing. "Wanta hear it?"

"Please."

Flipping over two pages of forms and carbon paper, Woods read: "The murder weapon was a German-made Bowie knife with a single-edged blade, five inches long. No fingerprints were found on the knife. The blood on the victim's clothing, a blue T-shirt and a pair of Levi's slacks, matched her blood-type, A-negative, which isn't very common. All the blood was probably her own."

"There still isn't any reason to think Sanchez didn't do it," Conglose said.

"What about the knife?" Lansing asked. "No fingerprints. Isn't that odd? Sanchez wasn't wearing gloves and he certainly didn't have an opportunity to wipe the handle clean while Donner was punching his face in."

"Damn it, Lansing!" Conglose snapped. "You know better than that! Clear prints are seldom left even when gloves aren't used."

"The report doesn't say, 'smudged prints,' Major," Lansing remarked. "It says, 'none'."

"Sanchez could have wrapped a handkerchief or even his shirttail around the handle of the knife when he stabbed the girl," Conglose suggested.

"That seems unlikely for a

crime of passion, sir. Sanchez was supposed to be acting in a fit of rage. Isn't it odd that he took that single precaution, but he was willing to commit murder in front of two witnesses? Three, if one includes Chester Rubin."

"You're clutching at straws, Lansing."

"Maybe, but I'm still not ready to close my investigation."

"Lansing, you're barking up the wrong tree this time. You should conduct this investigation with finesse. Something you've failed to do in the past."

"What does that mean, Major?"

"I mean you have ignored regulations in the past, Lansing," Conglose explained. "You've broken into offices and private property. You've withheld information from your superiors, and you've managed to get into some form of trouble with every one of your investigations. On at least two occasions you were assaulted. You've been clubbed over the head, shot at, nearly strangled and, most recently, you wound up with that broken wrist."

Lansing smiled thinly. "Killers can be quite crass at times. Some are downright impolite."

"Don't be insolent with me, Lansing!" Conglose snapped. "And I have a surprise for you. As this case involves the criminal use of narcotics as well as homicide, I'm going to join you for this investigation."

Lansing bit his lip to keep from speaking rashly. At last he said, "I'm speechless."

THE WHITE VOLKSWAGEN entered Bradford Barracks that afternoon. Lansing remembered the post from a former investigation. It was a small base even by USAEUR standards. Ignoring Major Conglose's objections, Lansing didn't pull up at the headquarters building to report to the post commander or the executive officer. He knew where most of the units were located and soon found Delta Battery. Parking by the curb, he and Conglose climbed out of the Volkswagen and walked to the building.

"I've never actually seen you in action before, Lansing," Conglose remarked snidely. "When are you going to impress me?"

"Probably never," Lansing muttered as they mounted the stairs.

Most batteries are designed in a similar manner. Finding the orderly room wasn't difficult. The majors were surprised to see that the battery commander, first sergeant and two clerks were busy preparing for a field maneuver. Lansing asked where they might find SP 4 Greg Donner. The "first shirt" informed them Donner was working in the unit supply section located in the basement.

Lansing and Conglose descended the stairs. Stepping into a corridor, they found doors la-

beled — Arms Room, TA50 (field gear), Storage and Supply Office. Entering the latter, they saw a fat black man with staff sergeant chevrons tacked to the collar of his fatigue shirt. He was writing down the nomenclatures of an assortment of typewriters and adding machines. Lansing and Conglose introduced themselves. The sergeant's name was Curtis.

"We'd like to speak with Spec. Four Donner," Lansing said.

"About that girl who got killed in his apartment last night?" Curtis asked.

"And the pot party they were having there," Conglose added.

"He's in the storage room getting tents and gear ready for our little trip Tuesday," Curtis answered. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't keep him from his work too long. He's also the supply driver and I need to turn this office equipment in for repairs. Wouldn't you know it? All this crap has to happen at once."

"We'll be as brief as possible, Sergeant," Lansing assured him.

They found Donner and three other EMs folding GP medium tents in the supply room. Easily recognizing Donner by red hair, Lansing called him into the corridor. Explaining who they were, Lansing and Conglose led Donner down the hall away from the others.

"You want to ask me about last night, huh?" the redhead guessed.

"That's right," Conglose replied. "Let's start with what sort of drugs you were passing around that night."

"Drugs?" Donner spread his hands helplessly. "Hey, I know you guys probably read my 201 and you know I've been busted a couple times for hash, but I don't touch that stuff anymore."

"I'll bet," Lansing muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" Conglose asked.

"I better ask Specialist Donner about the killing," Lansing answered. He turned to Donner. "Did you actually see the murderer?"

"Tracy moved to the bedroom. She screamed, fell over with a knife in her and Sanchez was standing in the doorway. That's what I saw," Donner replied.

"Then what did you do?"

"I told Nancy to call the cops and jumped Sanchez before he could get away."

"You beat him up pretty bad," Lansing said.

"How would you treat some son of a bitch who just killed your girl friend, sir?" Donner inquired grimly.

"Good point," Lansing admitted. "Sanchez says Tracy was going back with him."

"He's a dirty liar!" Donner snarled.

"Perhaps. But he isn't the only one." Before Donner or Conglose could ask what he

meant, Lansing said: "Why did you invite Tracy's ex-boy friend to the party?"

"I invited two of her former lovers. Chet Rubin used to date her too. I thought it would allow us to iron out difficulties. You know, I figured we could patch up old hurts. I told them to bring a date. Chet brought Nancy, but Sanchez came stag. Who would have guessed something like that would happen?"

"Maybe if you weren't all higher than a cloud, it wouldn't have happened," Conglose said sourly.

"Look, sir," Donner replied, barely concealing his anger, "I already told the German pigs I didn't have any stuff."

"Why did the *Polizei* suspect that you were using drugs?" Lansing asked.

"Because we were burning some incense. Some guys use it to hide the scent of hashish smoke," Donner explained.

"If you're so innocent, you shouldn't object if we search your apartment," Conglose said.

"Hell, yes! I object!" Donner answered. "But I couldn't stop you anyway. The XO and the battery commander have really come down on my ass. I've been restricted to Bradford Barracks, and I'll probably get an Article Fifteen or a Summary Court-Martial, too. Besides, whether or not you can search the apartment is up to the fat kraut bastard that

owns the building, not me."

"We'll do that," Conglose assured him. "Do you have the key?"

"To the apartment?" Donner snorted. "The XO took it. You'll have to see him about getting it."

"The XO? Is that still Lieutenant Colonel Falker?" Lansing asked.

Donner nodded.

"Do you know him, sir?"

"We've met," Lansing admitted. "After you beat up Sanchez, what happened?"

"Well, I tied him up while he was still unconscious. Then I waited for the police to arrive."

"I talked to the *Polizei* last night. They told me you locked the door of your apartment. They had to wait for you to unlock it. Why did you want to keep everybody out, Specialist?"

"Well, I knew that rubber-neckers might come in and louse up all the evidence. In the movies they always say not to touch anything at the scene of a crime, so I wanted to make sure nobody did. I didn't even pull the knife out of poor Tracy."

"And maybe you wanted to flush your hashish down the toilet and light that incense to cover up the smell," Conglose commented.

"If I did," Donner said with a smug smile, "you don't have anything on me for a drug bust. Do you, sir?"

Conglose's face darkened with anger. "We'll see about that,

Donner! I assume Colonel Falker allowed you to pack most of your belongings and bring them back to Bradford Barracks, correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then let's go see your battery commander. I want to inspect your quarters here on post. And I want to do it now!"

"Aw, hell," Donner muttered. "Can I at least tell Sergeant Curtis where I'm going so at least I won't have him on my ass, too?"

"Very well," Conglose agreed, then turning to Lansing, he said: "Are you coming, Major?"

"No thanks, sir," Lansing replied. "I think you can manage without me. I've got a couple of other people to talk to before we leave Bradford."

"Where do you think you're going, Lansing?" Conglose asked as the other major moved to the stairwell.

"Don't worry, sir," Lansing replied, mounting the steps. "I'll be back in about an hour. Meet you out front."

CLIFFORD LANSING SMILED as he slid behind the wheel of his Volkswagen, resisting the urge to cry *Hallelujah!* Major Conglose hindered his investigation by questioning suspects about narcotics. Lansing didn't work well with others while in the field; teaming him up with Captain Fuller from the Human Relations Office a few months earlier had

amply proven he operated better alone. Without Conglose's interference during interrogations, Lansing might be able to make some headway with his investigation.

Recalling where the post motor pool was located, Lansing drove to the center of Bradford Barracks and entered the glorified parking lot. The motor pool contained an assortment of M-60 tanks, armored cars, jeeps, "gamma-goats" and trucks. Parking the Volkswagen, Lansing emerged from the car and searched among the various battery offices in the pool until he found Bravo Battery's building.

Entering the little office, he saw a wiry, gray-haired sergeant first class chewing a cigar butt as he read an ill-treated vehicle log-book and shaking his head slowly. A young trooper, dressed in grease-stained mechanic's coveralls, stood by explaining the condition of a certain jeep. Behind them, seated at a desk, pounding on the keys of a typewriter, was a young black woman in fatigue uniform.

"... And the Colonel plans to take this pile of junk into the field?" the SFC moaned. "Damn! I need an aspirin."

"Is the whole base taking part in the field maneuver, Sergeant?" Lansing asked.

"Ooops!" the NCO exclaimed, snapping to attention. The mechanic and the clerk followed his example. "Excuse me, sir. Didn't

see you come in."

"No big deal, Sergeant," Lansing assured him, adding: "At ease." He often forgot he was a field grade officer and was certain he'd never get used to men jumping up and standing ramrod still everytime he entered a room. "As you were."

"Is there something I can do for you, sir?" the SFC asked, relaxing.

"I'd like to talk to PFC Jones about what happened last night. I'm sure you heard about it. I'm a CID homicide investigator."

"Of course you can talk to her, sir."

"I'd rather interview her privately, Sarge. If you don't mind."

"Sure, sir," the NCO replied. "Hawkes and I have to go check out this loused-up jeep anyway."

Lansing thanked him. When the SFC and the mechanic left, Lansing moved to the desk and introduced himself to Nancy Jones. She looked at him with surprise and ill-concealed fear as she learned he was with the CID.

"How'd you know where I work?" she asked.

"That information is in your 201 file," he replied. "Now, I'd like to know exactly what you saw last night."

"I saw Sanchez kill Tracy Collins."

"Let's start with Chester Rubin. Why was he in the bedroom?"

"Chet was drunk. He can't hold his liquor very well."

"How well does he hold his hashish?"

"What?"

"Sanchez already told me you were smoking hash that night," he explained. "Please understand, I'm not interested in a narc bust. If I was, I would have revealed what Sanchez told me to a certain colleague while we were questioning Red Donner a few minutes ago. So don't bother covering up anything. I'm a homicide investigator and that's *all* I am."

"Okay." She sighed deeply. "Chet was boozed up pretty bad and sky-high on hash. He always passes out when he does that. I think he *wanted* to pass out last night. He wanted to shut out the rest of the world and forget that Tracy Collins had dumped him like a used Kleenex."

"You sound bitter."

"Maybe I am."

"Chet was intoxicated, he used the bathroom and passed out on the bed," Lansing mused. "Then what happened?"

"We passed the bowl around and kept on drinking. Well, Sanchez is a beer drinker, you know? So he had to take a leak. After he finished using the bathroom, Tracy got up and went into the bedroom. Then, she screamed and fell back into the sitting room. When she fell on the pillows, I thought she was only pretending to be hurt. So I told her to knock it off."

"That's a rather strange reac-

tion," Lansing commented. "Why did you think she was pretending to be hurt?"

"Because she and Red were a couple of real sick practical jokers. You know the kind. They'd put rubber worms in people's drinks, plastic vomit on the floor, stuff like that. So at first I thought they were pulling another dumb stunt, but then I saw her lying there with that knife in her chest. Her blood was so red against her orange T-shirt ..." Nancy closed her eyes and shuddered.

"What happened next?"

"Red told me to get the police. God, I was so scared I would have done anything he told me to do. I was just glad to have a reason to get the hell out of that room. Guess that proves I wouldn't do very well in combat, huh?" She frowned. "Anyway, I went into the hallway and started screaming for help. A few Germans came out and a couple understood English. Somebody called the police. The landlord let me stay in his apartment until the cops arrived. That was okay with me. I sure didn't want to go back to that room with Tracy lying dead and that crazy murderer Sanchez still loose."

"You couldn't have gotten into the apartment anyway. Red locked the door until the police arrived."

"I know. A couple of the krauts tried to break it down so they could help Red. Beats me, why he locked it. Maybe to keep people from pawing around, like he says, or

maybe he wanted to get rid of the hash."

"Or maybe he didn't want anyone to prevent him from beating up on Sanchez after he'd tied him up," Lansing remarked. "Please, think carefully. Is there anything else you remember? Anything at all?"

"Well, I remember Red and Tracy weren't smoking or drinking much. Chet got mad at Donner for not using the hash pipe. That was pretty weird 'cause Red hardly ever smoked, and Chet knows it." Nancy squinted as she strained her memory. "Tracy took her purse with her as she went into the bathroom. That was funny, 'cause she usually didn't even carry a handbag. Course, she seemed to be trying to get a comb or a brush or something out of it ..." Nancy's eyes widened suddenly. "Wait a minute. I should have told you this before!"

"Well, tell me now," Lansing urged.

"Sanchez was looking at her like he hated her guts. I never seen him look at Tracy that way before. Seeing her with Red was sort of driving him crazy."

"Thank you for your time," Lansing said, trying to hide his disappointment that the interview hadn't been more fruitful. "By the way, what did you think of Tracy?"

"Oh, she was a little flirty, but she was basically a nice girl ..."

"Spare me the crap," Lansing

said flatly. "I want your honest opinion."

"She was a two-timing, bitchy tramp," Nancy answered savagely.

"That's better." Lansing nodded. "The CID may have to contact you again so..."

"You can expect *another* investigator to talk to you in the future!" a hard, sour voice behind Lansing announced.

Lansing closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, attempting to combat an instant headache created by the sound of that voice. He turned slowly and opened his eyes to see a short, wiry man with a skull-like face, the colorless thin lips set in a twisted sneer. The man wore a neatly pressed khaki uniform with a silver oak-leaf displayed on each collar. The diminutive lieutenant colonel stood in the doorway, his pipe-stem arms folded across his narrow chest.

"Good afternoon, Colonel Falker," Lansing said, snapping to attention sharply. "I thought I recognized your voice, sir."

FIVE MINUTES LATER, Major Lansing stood in LTC Falker's office. He recalled the other time he'd been in the XO's room. Lansing was investigating the murder of the post commander of Bradford Barracks, Colonel Cyrus Grant. Still a captain, Lansing had angered Falker by refusing to investigate blackmarket activities.

Ten months had passed and another homicide had brought Lansing to Bradford Barracks; and LTC Falker was still angry. Major Conglose watched Falker pace back and forth with his fists on his hips as Lansing stood rigidly at attention. Conglose's pleasure at witnessing his fellow CID officer's plight was obvious as he shook his head as if to say "I-told-you-so."

"Lansing, I remember you from last year," Falker began. "You know damn good and well where this headquarters building is, but Major Conglose informed me you drove right by it without telling us you were on post investigating this junkie-killing business."

"Major Conglose told you, huh?" Lansing asked dryly.

"He came to see me about borrowing the key I confiscated from Donner last night at that dope den of an apartment he was renting off post — against regulation." Falker added the latter as if the violation were more serious than the homicide that had occurred there. The light colonel's expression changed slightly as he noticed the cast at the end of Lansing's arm. "What happened to your hand? Did you break your wrist?"

"No, sir," Lansing replied. "I apprehended a murderer in Frankfort last week. He broke it for me."

"I'm in no mood for your jokes, Lansing," Falker snapped. "Just what do you think you're doing?"

Are you trying to get another feather in your cap by investigating a murder that's already been solved?" Falker snorted with disgust. "Oh, I've read about you in *The Stars and Stripes* or *The Overseas Weekly* or whatever publication it is that seems to consider you some sort of hero. You're always solving baffling homicides all over Germany, aren't you? Munson Barracks, Kirby Barracks, everywhere. Maybe you're beginning to believe your own legend, Lansing."

"I'm not prepared to close my case, sir," Lansing replied flatly, working to conceal all traces of anger from his voice.

"Your case?" Falker exclaimed. "What case? Sanchez killed his ex-girlfriend at a pot party." Tilting his head to indicate Major Conglose, Falker continued: "This man has something to investigate. Those soldiers (and I use the term loosely) were using narcotics last night. I want to know what kind of drugs were there, who was the supplier, and who is he selling it to..."

"The proof against Sanchez is not conclusive, sir," Lansing insisted.

"Oh! Conglose told me that rubbish about that knife not having fingerprints," Falker said. "I suggest your lab crew run their tests again. They probably made some sort of mistake."

"There is still a reasonable doubt, sir," Lansing said. "And I

can't close this case until I'm certain the right person is sitting in a stockade cell for the murder of Specialist Collins."

"Lansing, I think you're glory hungry," Falker snarled, staring up at the tall CID investigator. "I also consider your attitude bordering on insubordination. If you can't prove that Sanchez *didn't* kill that girl last night, I intend to have you investigated for conduct unbecoming an officer!" Falker smiled without warmth as he added: "This is not a threat, Major, it's a goddamn promise! Do you have anything to say before I dismiss you, Lansing?"

The CID investigator took a deep breath before he spoke.

"I haven't seen you for sometime, sir." Lansing forced a thin smile. "How've you been?"

Falker's eyes nearly popped from their sockets as he glared at Lansing with unfettered fury. "You're dismissed. Get the hell out of my office!"

Lansing and Conglose emerged from the XO's office and walked down the corridor in silence until Conglose said, "That last remark you made didn't help matters, Lansing."

"Yeah," Lansing muttered. "But I want to thank you for all the help you gave me back there."

"Don't blame me. I told you all along this was an open-and-shut case. I don't see why you insist Sanchez is innocent."

"I never said he was *innocent*;

I'm just not convinced he's guilty."

"Well, if he isn't innocent you've put yourself in a lot of hot water, Lansing."

"Tell me, Major," Lansing sighed, "is it possible that you might be *related* to Colonel Falker?"

AS LANSING DROVE the Volkswagen back to the motor pool, he briefed Conglose concerning his conversation with Nancy Jones. Conglose, in turn, informed Lansing that he had searched SP4 Donner's quarters and failed to find anything to suggest the man was involved in drugs or murder.

"Then I decided to see the XO about the key to Donner's apartment. When I told him you were investigating the homicide, Falker hit the ceiling," Conglose said. "He told me to wait in his office, then he stormed out of the building and climbed into his car."

"I wish you had waited for me at Delta Battery, instead," Lansing said. "Falker wasted a lot of valuable time by hauling me in for an ass-chewing. I hope he didn't go to Bravo Battery's mess-hall first to ask Chet Rubin if I'd talked to him yet; I don't like anyone putting suspects on their guard before I get a chance to interview them."

"I don't think he was gone that long." Conglose shrugged. "By the way, I have the key so we'll be able to inspect Donner's apart-

ment tonight after we leave Bradford."

"Swell," Lansing muttered. "Of course, we'll have to get permission from the landlord before we enter the apartment, and he could let us in with a passkey."

"Oh, I didn't think of that," Conglose admitted, clearing his throat with embarrassment.

Entering the motor pool, Lansing soon located Alpha, Bravo and Charlie Batteries mess-halls lined up at the west wing. He wondered why so many military installations built their dining sections in the same area with the tanks, trucks, welding areas and workshops. Maybe some Army barracks constructor felt the mechanics deserved to be first in the chowline (and maybe they do). Parking his car by B-Battery mess, Lansing climbed out, closely followed by Conglose.

Army mess-halls generally close early on Sunday afternoons. Lansing and Conglose discovered the serving line was empty and only a few soldiers were still seated at the dining tables. Civilian KPs were already mopping the floors and washing dishes.

Finding the mess sergeant, Lansing asked if one of the cooks, PFC Rubin, was on duty. The sergeant informed him that Rubin was with some of the other cooks outside. The men generally took a break after serving the meals they

had prepared. Following the mess sergeant's direction, Lansing and Conglose moved through the kitchen to the rear exit.

Stepping outside, they discovered two men in cook-whites sitting on a bench smoking cigarettes. The cooks jumped to attention. One man was black, but he was too short and heavy-set to fit Rubin's description.

"At ease, gentlemen," Lansing said. "Do you know where PFC Rubin is?"

The black cook nodded. "He's over by the trees near the fence, sir."

The two majors soon found a lanky black man in cook-whites standing in front of a sickly oak. Rubin's back was turned to them as he held a kitchen knife by the blade, raised it to his ear, and hurled it at a small paper target tacked to the tree. The point sank into the target, missing the bull's-eye by mere centimeters. Rubin threw another knife, striking the center of the target at the rim of the bull's-eye. Lansing glanced at Conglose, feeling somewhat pleased by the startled expression on the other man's face.

"I bet you're a hell of a dart player," Lansing commented.

"What?" Rubin turned quickly, his eyes widening with surprise. "Oh, I ... I just kinda fool around at this, sir," he explained, saluting awkwardly. "I ain't hurting nothing, the tree's already dead."

"If it wasn't, you would have

killed it by now," Lansing mused. "We're from the CID, Rubin, I'd like to talk to you about Tracy Collins."

"Oh, that." Rubin shrugged. "Not much I can tell you. I was out cold when Sanchez killed her."

"Really?" Lansing raised an eyebrow. "Then how do you know he did it?"

"Well, that's what Red and Nancy said, so I guess that's how it happened."

"Didn't you date Tracy a while back?"

"Yes, sir. About four months ago."

"I understand she broke up with you to go with Sanchez. Correct?"

Rubin nodded.

"So why did you accept an invitation to Donner's party?"

"Well, I ... you know, it was all over between Tracy and me. There's other fish in the sea, right? I guess I wanted to show her that I got another woman and I wasn't hurtin' any for her." Rubin forced a smile. "Besides, Red always throws a great party with lots of booze and — er, other stuff."

"Such as drugs? Hashish?" Conglose inquired.

"How did you feel when you saw Tracy with Donner?" Lansing asked, ignoring the other major's question.

"I felt like I was showin' her, man."

"I don't believe you, Rubin," Lansing told him.

"Okay ..." Rubin bit his lip and stared down at the ground. "I felt awful, that's how I felt. Tracy could make a man think the whole world was his personal playground. We were getting it on together so good, and then she just up and left me. Seeing her with Donner just reminded me how it hurt when she dumped me."

"What did you want to do because of this feeling?"

"I wanted to get drunk. I wanted to get high. I wanted to get so stoned I wouldn't know nothin' that was going on around me."

"High? Stoned?" Conglose asked eagerly.

"Do you always hide from everything that upsets you, Rubin?" Lansing inquired. "Do you always have to blow yourself away with some kind of intoxication? Haven't you ever tried taking your mind off something unpleasant by finding something constructive to do instead?"

Rubin stared at him blankly.

"Try it sometime," Lansing suggested. "Anyway, you passed out in the bedroom. You were so smashed you didn't hear Tracy scream. You didn't hear Nancy calling for help or Red Donner beating Sanchez to a pulp. That's hard to believe, Rubin."

"I heard it, sort of," Rubin replied slowly. "I thought it was a nightmare." He blinked as tears formed in his eyes. "But when I

woke up, the nightmare was still there."

MAJOR CONGLOSE STARED through the windshield at the sky as the creeping twilight of early summer forced the sun to the horizon. "What do you think, Lansing?" he asked.

"I think I'm going to have a hard time finding the right building," Lansing replied as he steered the Volkswagen through the cobblestone-paved streets of Furth.

"I mean about Rubin. Do you think he's lying? Those tears were real enough."

"Anyone can cry. Even killers," Lansing said. "Besides, those tears could have been a way to release tension while being questioned under stress."

"You don't think he really cared about that girl?"

"All of them loved Tracy, or at least they thought they did. Everyone except Nancy Jones, of course."

"Do you think *she* could have done it?"

"I think she would have *liked* to do it."

"Rubin could have pretended to be unconscious," Conglose said. "He could have waited for Sanchez to come out of the bathroom and then thrown the knife into her from across the room. Sanchez didn't see it happen. He just heard the scream and ran

forward to help her. Donner and Nancy saw her fall with the knife in her chest. Sanchez was in the doorway. Naturally they'd assume he killed the girl. Rubin only needed to continue pretending he was unconscious and allow Sanchez to take the rap."

"So much for an open-and-shut case," Lansing said dryly.

"I'm only stating a theory," Conglose replied defensively. "Sanchez is still the most likely suspect. The problem is: How do we determine which one killed her?"

"That's what makes investigative work so interesting," Lansing said as he honked the horn at a woman on a bicycle who shot out of an alley in front of him.

"Lansing!" Conglose exclaimed. "I just got a crazy idea. What if Tracy Collins *killed herself*? Nancy Jones said she was taking something out of her purse as she went into the bedroom. Maybe she was pulling the knife from her handbag."

"So the victim becomes a suspect," Lansing mused. "But what motive would she have? If she did commit suicide, she did it in front of Sanchez, which meant she either wanted him to see her do it or she wanted him to take the blame. Why would she be willing to take her own life just to do something nasty to him?"

"Maybe she was dying from cancer or something and she had some sort of personal reason to

want Sanchez to suffer. What if she didn't dump Sanchez? What if she was actually still madly in love with Sanchez when *he* broke up with *her*? Tracy had never forgiven him, she was dying from a long, painful illness, and the chance to end her own suffering and punish Sanchez at the same time presented itself."

"Her medical records are in her two-o-one file. There wasn't anything to suggest she was in poor health."

"But if she'd only found out that she was terminally ill less than a month ago, it wouldn't be recorded in her two-o-one yet. I think we should find out if she'd gone on sick call in the last month and, if she had, whether she went to the USAEUR hospital in Nuremberg."

"Well, right now we'd better inspect Donner's apartment," Lansing said as he pulled up to the curb by a brownstone apartment building.

The landlord was an Italian who spoke English far better than he did German. Mr. Bonnelli was very willing to assist the American Army and he began to explain how he had saved an American soldier's life in the Second World War. As he escorted them upstairs to the apartment, Bonnelli finished his story and told them that he had supported the Allied Powers.

"I don't trust none'a these older Germans," Bonnelli said. "You

never know which one'a them might've been a Nazi, eh?" he commented as he unlocked the door with his passkey.

"I guess not," Lansing muttered. "Thank you."

As Bonnelli descended the stairs, Lansing and Conglose entered Donner's apartment. Flicking on the light, they gazed down at the mass of pillows on the floor of the sitting room. One pillow was marred by dark brown stains of dried blood.

"Look at this place!" Conglose exclaimed. "What an opium den! Still, Donner probably flushed the hash down the toilet." He sighed deeply. "I'd better check anyway."

As Conglose began searching through drawers and under rugs, Lansing moved to the nearest wastebasket. It was empty. He walked into the bedroom and checked the basket there. It too, was empty. The last waste container was in the bathroom.

"Empty," Lansing said to himself, staring down at the final basket.

"I didn't find a damn thing except a couple of incense burners," Conglose commented as he entered the bathroom. "Did you find anything?"

"Perhaps," Lansing said, nodding slightly. "All the wastebaskets are empty. This is Sunday, so I doubt if the management has been in her to clean up yet."

"Maybe the trash cans were

empty before last night's party," Conglose suggested.

"No, there aren't any empty beer cans lying around. These baskets were dumped *after* the party. After Tracy was murdered."

Conglose shrugged. "So what?"

"Falker allowed Donner to pack some of his belongings before he left his place and moved back on base," Lansing said. "So, he probably dumped the trash at that time also."

Suddenly, Lansing walked briskly from the bathroom, through the bedroom, out of the apartment, and into the corridor. Conglose followed, demanding to know what the hell was going on. Smiling as he saw what he was looking for at the end of the hall, Lansing moved to it rapidly. A metal flap covered the mouth of a chute built inside the wall.

"This is where he deposited his trash," Lansing said. "The chute probably opens up into a dumpster outside the building. The garbage collector won't be here until Tuesday morning, so it's still there."

"What's still there?" Conglose persisted. "Look, Lansing. If you're getting all excited about the possibility of finding a hash pipe in the garbage, you might as well relax. Unless there's a clear fingerprint on it — which is unlikely because junkies pass it around to each other so much — I

can't use it as evidence against Donner for a narc bust."

"We can't be sure what's in that dumpster until we look," Lansing replied, smiling at Conglose. "I hope you don't mind getting your uniform dirty, sir."

Ten minutes later, the two majors were inside a large metal trash dumpster, hunting among the garbage with a flashlight. Rotting food and discarded beer and wine containers created a strong stench as they probed among the old newspapers, broken bottles and used diapers.

"I don't know how I let you talk me into this, Lansing," Conglose complained. "Two field grade officers up to their knees in garbage. It's outrageous! My uniform is getting filthy. Couldn't we at least have waited until we changed out of our class-A's before playing around in this trash heap?"

"Luis Sanchez is still in a prison cell. If he's innocent, I don't want him to remain there a minute longer than necessary. Besides, I already told you I'd pay the dry-cleaning bill."

"We don't even know what we're looking for ..." Conglose began.

"Hold the light over here, sir," Lansing instructed as he dragged a soggy paper sack from beneath a cluster of torn newspapers.

"What is it?" Conglose asked, training the flashlight on the object.

"It feels like ..." Lansing paused as he held the bag awkwardly with his right hand, the cast on his wrist making his movements clumsy. Tearing it apart with his other hand, Lansing revealed a bright orange cloth wrapped tightly around a hard object. Unwinding it, they discovered it was a T-shirt with scarlet stains on one side. The object within was a Bowie knife with two or three inches of the blade broken off at the end.

"Those look like blood stains," Conglose said.

"But they're not," Lansing stated. "It's either ketchup or red paint."

"What does this mean?" Conglose asked helplessly.

"It means you were right," Lansing told him. "Tracy Collins helped in getting herself killed."

TAKING THE NEW EVIDENCE to the white Volkswagen, Lansing handed the T-shirt and broken knife to Conglose as he fished the car keys out of his pocket. Unlocking the trunk of the VW, Lansing removed a briefcase. Popping it open, he extracted a .45 caliber Colt 1911 pistol from the container.

"Will you please chamber a round and put the safety on, sir?" Lansing asked. "It's difficult for me to work the slide with this cast on my wrist."

"When did you get this thing?"

Conglose inquired as he followed Lansing's instructions.

"I drew it out of the arms room at CID headquarters as soon as I was assigned to the case. I've needed a gun too many times during past investigations. I finally decided to get one in advance, just in case."

"All right." Conglose handed the pistol to Lansing. "Now what do we do?"

"We go back to Bradford Barracks and arrest the killer," Lansing replied as he shoved the .45 into his belt.

They entered the base at eleven thirty-five (2335 hours). Parking the Volkswagen in front of Delta Battery, they walked into the building and encountered a sleepy-eyed buck sergeant in charge of quarters duty. Explaining their reason for being there, Lansing and Conglose were escorted by the CQ upstairs. Finding the room they wanted, Lansing knocked on the door until a disgruntled young man clad in his underwear opened it.

"Excuse me," Lansing said as he walked past the startled soldier and into the room. He flicked on the light and announced: "Specialist Donner? Get dressed and come along with us. You're under arrest."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Donner exclaimed as he shot off his bunk, his eyes wide and his mouth hanging open.

Donner's roommates, the other

EMs from the D-Battery supply section, stood by their beds, amazement painted on their young faces.

"You murdered Tracy Collins, Donner," Lansing told him.

"That's crazy!" the big redhead replied. "I wasn't anywhere near her when Sanchez killed her!"

Lansing ignored the outburst. "I'm going to explain what happened last night, Donner. Nancy Jones told me you and Tracy were very fond of 'sick practical jokes.' At the party, you two planned a very convincing 'joke.' You needed at least one witness and one fall guy. So you invited two of Tracy's ex-boyfriends to attend. You probably expected only one of them to show up, hopefully with a date to be the witness. However, getting Chet Rubin drunk enough to pass out wasn't difficult.

"So Sanchez was the fall guy, Nancy was the witness, and Rubin was a bit of frosting on the cake. Knowing that Sanchez would consume enough beer to require a trip to the bathroom, you waited. When Tracy heard the toilet flush, she began *her* part of the 'joke.' Walking into the bedroom, she took the broken knife we found in the trash and a tube of something red enough to resemble blood. Bursting the tube on her T-shirt, she fell back onto the pillows and held the knife to her chest.

"Aware of what tricksters you two were, Nancy thought it was a

joke until she saw the knife 'sticking in' Tracy. The illusion fooled her. You told her to call the police, making her bolt out of the apartment as you'd hoped she would. Then you jumped Sanchez, who was still recovering from the surprise and horror of seeing Tracy lying 'dead' in front of him. Knocking him unconscious, you then locked the door. Tracy was no doubt startled that you had sent Nancy to get help and slugged Sanchez. That's when you killed her."

"That's the wildest story I ever heard!" Donner exclaimed. "You can't prove any of this nutty crap!"

"Yes, we can," Lansing assured him. "The autopsy of Tracy's body revealed bruises on her head and buttocks. She wouldn't have gotten those by falling down on a bunch of pillows. It happened when you pushed her down and slammed her head against the floor to knock her unconscious. Then you dragged her over to the pillows, removed the T-shirt with the false blood, slipped on another shirt and drove the unbroken knife into her heart."

"Your biggest mistake was the color of the T-shirts. The one on Tracy's corpse was blue, but Nancy remembered that Tracy was wearing an orange one that night. The same orange T-shirt we found in the dumpster. Your other big mistake was throwing the evidence into the trash. You should

have smuggled it out with your other belongings and buried it somewhere."

Donner was silent for a moment. Then he whispered hoarsely, "She was gonna leave me. She'd been seeing a second lieutenant and she was getting ready to dump me. I couldn't bear the idea of losing her. You don't know what she could do to a man. You don't know how badly she could make a guy want her."

"I've heard," Lansing replied.

"If I couldn't have her, nobody would. I was jealous of any man that ever touched her. Sanchez, Rubin, anyone. If I could have gotten that damn shave-tail bastard up to my apartment that night, I would have set him up instead of Sanchez, but I didn't know his name."

Donner buried his face in his hands and wept as he slowly fell to his knees. Lansing drew his pistol, but pointed it at the floor as he spoke. "Major, will you please call the MPs."

Conglose nodded woodenly. "I guess you were right about killers being able to cry, Lansing."

"Yeah," Lansing replied dryly, "but don't feel too sorry for him. He killed one person and nearly ruined another's life. After you call the cops, maybe you'll contact the stockade and tell them to release Sanchez."

"After getting my class-A uniform filthy?" Conglose snorted. "I'm calling them first."

GUARDIAN OF THE HEARTH

By Richard Deming

The Killer Was Out to Get Josephine, But Coco Joe the Pomeranian Was Determined to Protect His Mistress from Harm!

IT WAS EXACTLY THREE P.M. when the door chimes sounded, because the oven timer bell went off at the same moment. Coco Joe, as usual, made a beeline for the front door, barking his head off. Josephine was considerably longer

getting there. She first shut off the oven, lifted the cookies from the oven with a pot holder, set them on top of the stove and hung up the pot holder. At sixty-five she was still slim and trim, but she no longer hurried.

The Pomeranian was still barking furiously when Josephine finally got to the door, indicating that the caller had not given up and gone away. Josephine said, "Hush! It's only the lady from the doggie parlor, come to get you for your bath and trim."

But it wasn't, she saw when she peeped through the viewing hole. It was a man in a blue serge suit. She scooped up the little dog in her arms before opening the door.

Coco Joe, as always when a man came to the door, went into an absolute fit. Growling and snarling, he did his best to struggle from his mistress's arms and fling himself at the intruder's throat.

The man stood there examining the dog warily as Josephine repeatedly but lightly slapped his muzzle and said, "Stop it! He's a nice man. Stop it now!"

When Coco Joe finally stopped struggling, and his performance tapered off to mere low, threatening growls, Josephine said, "I'm sorry. He thinks he's a mastiff."

The visitor, a stocky man of about forty, gave her a pleasant smile. Producing a wallet, he displayed a police badge pinned inside of it.

"Sergeant Dennis Cord, ma'am. Are you Miss Henry?"

"Yes."

"May I have a few words with you?"

"Certain —" Josephine started to say, then Coco Joe suddenly went into another frenzy when he detected the presence of another man alongside the door.

The second man loomed into view, smiling apologetically. He was young, large, blond; and wore a blue police uniform.

When Josephine had quieted the dog for a second time, Sergeant Cord introduced the uniformed man as Officer Harry Dewey. He told Dewey to wait outside and stepped into the apartment with Josephine.

His entrance into the apartment brought on another display of ferocity from Coco Joe. Again Josephine had to slap his muzzle and say, "Stop it! He's a friend. Be nice, now!"

When for a third time the dog's performance had finally tapered off to occasional low-throated growls, Josephine said, "He'll be all right in a minute. He doesn't bite anyway. He just puts on a fierce show."

Kneeling, she held the Pomeranian so that he could sniff the sergeant's shoes. "Make friends now," she ordered. "He's a nice man."

Sergeant Cord stood perfectly still while the little dog sniffed at his feet and trouser legs. When the growling finally stopped, Josephine cautiously released her grip. Coco Joe took a final sniff, then turned his back and trotted over to leap into his favorite

chair. His tail had not wagged even once, but the sergeant had his permission to stay on a probationary basis.

Rising to her feet, Josephine said, "He'll be all right now, Sergeant. Will you have a seat?"

"Thank you, ma'am."

He took the chair farthest from Coco Joe. Seating herself on the sofa, Josephine looked at him expectantly.

"I'm afraid I have some rather disquieting news for you, Miss Henry," the detective said.

"Oh, my. Has someone I know been hurt?"

"Oh, no, it's not that — well, as a matter of fact someone you know has been hurt, but you didn't know her well. Mrs. Ann Sommerfield."

Josephine gazed at him blankly.

"One of your fellow jurors on the Pitton case," the sergeant prompted.

"Oh, of course," Josephine said. "That thin, rather humorless woman." Then she looked puzzled. "I'm sorry to hear she's been hurt, but I don't understand —"

When she let it trail off, the sergeant said, "She was a little more than just hurt, I'm afraid. She's been murdered."

Josephine could feel herself turning pale. After a moment she said, "By James Clayton?"

"We think so."

Josephine felt a cold, invisible hand squeeze her spine. James Clayton was the Clyde in the

Bonnie-and-Clyde relationship between himself and Delores Pitton. Six months back, Josephine, along with eleven other jurors, had found Delores Pitton guilty of first-degree murder in the bank-robbery death of a bank teller. Because the jury had refused to recommend leniency, the woman had received the maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

James Clayton, who was still at large, mailed a letter post-marked the same date as the sentencing to the presiding judge. In it he threatened to kill the judge, the prosecutor and every member of the jury if his girlfriend was not given her freedom.

All fourteen of those threatened had immediately been placed under heavy police guard. But after six weeks with no attempts on the lives of any of the fourteen, no further threats and no reported sightings of the notorious bandit that could be authenticated, the guard had been relieved. Nothing had been heard of James Clayton since, and it was now months since he had even been mentioned in the news.

Josephine said, in a tone she tried to keep steady, "He was just lying low until he was sure security measures had been relaxed, then?"

"Apparently. I thought at the time that the publicity given his threat, and particularly the publicity given to the security

measures taken to protect all of you, was a mistake. I wasn't on the case at that time, but I recall there were even photographs in the paper of some of the threatened jurors with their police bodyguards."

Josephine nodded. "There was one of me and Mrs. Murphy, seated together in this room, on the front page. Mrs. Murphy was the policewoman who stayed here nights after the threat."

"Oh, yes, Connie Murphy. She's currently on leave to have a baby."

"Well, how nice!" Then Josephine pulled herself from this pleasant distraction back to the unpleasant reality of murder. "When did it happen? Mrs. Sommerfield, I mean."

"Apparently last night, but it wasn't discovered until this morning, when a friend dropped by to see her. She was a widow and lived alone, you know. It will be in tonight's paper, although we are not at this time releasing that we think the killer was Clayton. We don't intend to make the same mistake we did after his threatening letter."

"I see. How — how was it done?"

"With a knife. No weapon was found at the scene, but we guess it was a switchblade, since he's known to carry one with a seven-inch blade. There was only a single stab wound, through the heart, and apparently she was

killed in her sleep, because she was in bed and there was no sign of a struggle."

Josephine shivered. "How did he get in?"

"We don't know. There was no sign of forced entry. The front door was off the latch, which is how the friend got in when she discovered the body, but we think he left it that way on the way out. The friend says it's inconceivable that Mrs. Sommerfield would have left any door or window unlocked, because she was almost neurotically afraid of burglars. James Clayton is an expert burglar, though, in addition to being a heist artist. As a matter of fact, he has numerous criminal talents. He's really quite a clever man, even if he is psychotic. And he's slippery as an eel. As you know, we've never even come close to laying a hand on him. If he hadn't been off somewhere when his girlfriend was taken, I rather suspect he might have slid her out of that."

After a period of silence, Josephine asked, "If there was no sign of forced entry, and no weapon left behind, how do you know it was James Clayton?"

"He inadvertently left behind a clue. A list containing the names of all twelve jurors in the Pitton case, the judge and the prosecutor. Mrs. Sommerfield's name was first on the list, and a line in red ink was drawn through it. We think that what happened was that he took out the list to

draw a line through her name immediately after killing her, then for some reason got rattled and left it lying on her dresser instead of putting it back in his pocket. The woman kept a cat, and maybe it came into the bedroom and distracted him just then. The paper had some fingerprints on it, but we can't check them against Clayton's because his aren't on file. He's never been in custody."

"Yes, I recall that from the time of the trial. Do you think he still plans to carry out his two-victims-at-a-time threat?"

"There is no reason to believe he has changed his plan. If he manages to kill a second victim, we anticipate that the judge will get another letter demanding Delores Pitton's release, or he will kill another two."

After considering this, Josephine said, "Then we will all be placed under guard again for awhile. The police can hardly afford to keep around-the-clock bodyguards on twelve people indefinitely, so when they are eventually withdrawn, he will come back and kill two more."

"We plan to prevent him from killing his second victim. We hope to catch him."

Josephine said dryly, "Neither the police from coast-to-coast nor the FBI has had much success at that endeavor up to now."

"No," the sergeant admitted. "But do you suggest we release Delores Pitton from prison?"

"Of course not. Every thug in the country with a girlfriend or partner in jail would immediately try the same stunt."

"Exactly," Sergeant Cord agreed.

"Nevertheless it leaves us survivors in a rather uncomfortable position. Do you recall where I was on that list you mentioned, Sergeant?"

"Second, Miss Henry."

Josephine blinked.

"There is nothing to worry about, though," he assured her. "You are already under around-the-clock guard. The officer in the hallway I introduced you to will remain there after I leave, and will be relieved by another guard when his trick is up. There is also an officer stationed behind the apartment building at the back door to check everyone who goes in that way."

"Last time a policewoman stayed with me nights."

"One will this time also. I am assigning to you the women's pistol champ of the force."

"Well, that's somewhat reassuring," Josephine said.

The detective stood up. "I guess that about covers it, Miss Henry. Officer Phelps — that's the policewoman I'm sending over, Gladys Phelps — will be along well before dark. Meantime, if you wish to go out anywhere, Officer Dewey out in the hallway will accompany you."

"Thank you, Sergeant. Would

you like a cookie before you go? I was just taking them from the oven when you rang the bell."

"I can smell them," he said, sitting down again. "Thank you, I would love one."

As Josephine rose from the sofa, the door chimes sounded, again sending Coco Joe to the door, barking furiously. Josephine gave Sergeant Cord an inquiring look.

"Your caller had to be passed by Officer Dewey," he said reassuringly. "But just to make sure, I'll check."

Rising, he went over to the door and peered through the peephole. At his feet the Pomeranian continued his furious barking.

"Someone in orange coveralls," he announced. "A woman, I think."

"Oh, that's the *Canine Beauty Care Center*, come to take Coco for his weekly bath and trim."

The police officer stepped back and Josephine opened the door. Coco Joe rushed out, snarling, then stopped and began to wag his tail after a sniff at the messenger's legs.

The woman was tall and rather masculine looking, with short-cropped black hair and a lean, not very curvaceous body. She wore one-piece coveralls of bright orange with *Canine Beauty Care Center* embroidered in small black letters over her heart. Josephine had never seen her before.

"You're new, aren't you?" she said. "What happened to Stella?"

"She's on vacation. I'm Maggie." She glanced at Sergeant Cord behind Josephine, at Officer Dewey alongside the door, then stooped to pick up the little dog. "I guess this is Coco Joe, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's Coco," Josephine said. "You're going with the nice lady, Coco Joe. You be good now."

"Oh, he'll be good," the woman said, stroking the dog's neck. "He's a little darling. Will you be home about six, Miss Henry?"

"Yes, I plan to be."

"Then I'll drop him off on my way home, instead of making a special trip. I go within a few blocks of here."

"All right, that will be fine."

Coco Joe made no objection to the woman carrying him over to the elevator. He gave Officer Dewey a warning growl, though, when he went over to push the elevator signal button for the messenger, but made no attempt to attack the policeman. Coco only had conniption fits when men tried to enter the apartment.

When Josephine closed the door, Sergeant Cord asked, "How come your dog didn't devour her?"

"He only attacks men," Josephine told him. "He loves women. I think he regards them as sex objects."

The sergeant murmured, "How could he tell in this case?" then looked as though he wished he hadn't.

"She was a bit boyish, wasn't she?" Josephine said with a grin, and went on into the kitchen for the cookies. From there she called, "Would you like some tea also, Sergeant? Or a glass of milk?"

After a short delay, during which the detective considered these two choices, he called back, "Milk would be fine, ma'am."

When she returned with a plate of cookies, a glass of milk and a napkin, he had reseated himself. Josephine set everything on the end table next to his chair, took a single cookie from the plate and returned to the sofa.

"I seldom nibble between meals," she explained. "So I'll just taste one to see how they came out. But you have all you wish, Sergeant. There are plenty more."

"Thank you, ma'am." He helped himself to a cookie and tasted it. "Umm, delicious. You bake like my mother used to."

"Why, thank you, Sergeant."

Both nibbled for a few minutes. Presently she said, "It would be helpful to have a picture of James Clayton, in case he tried coming around as a door-to-door salesman or something."

"Sorry, but there are no mug shots, because he's never been arrested. We do have what we

believe is a pretty good description, though. He is thirty-two years old, but looks younger because he has a smooth complexion and a rather boyish face. He has blue eyes and straw-colored hair that he wore in a crewcut on his last bank job, but that was more than seven months ago, so it may be longer now. He is five-feet-six to five-feet-seven-inches tall, and weighs an estimated hundred and thirty-five pounds."

"I am already familiar with his description," Josephine said. "It was printed at the time of his threatening letter just after the trial. It always surprised me that such a violent man was so small."

"They often are," the sergeant said. "From Billy the Kid right up through James Clayton the most vicious killers in this country have generally been relatively small men. Psychologists say that's one of the things that turns them vicious. They're compensating for getting pushed around as kids."

"I suppose there's at least a germ of truth in that," Josephine said reflectively. "Before I retired from schoolteaching, I often wondered when I saw some bully picking on a smaller boy, how the victim would be affected later in life by his recollection of the unpleasant experience. Perhaps the bullies he encountered as a child are more responsible for James Clayton's career in crime than

anything basically evil in the man."

"Don't start feeling sorry for him," the detective advised her. "He is known to have killed at least five people prior to Mrs. Sommerfield, and at least three of the killings were deliberate acts of viciousness which were entirely unnecessary. One was an old man, a customer at one of the banks he and Delores knocked over, who simply failed to move as fast as Clayton wanted him to. Turned out later he couldn't, because he was arthritic."

"I know he's a terrible man," Josephine conceded. "And I am hardly inclined to sympathize with anyone whose goal is to kill me. But I can still regret the traumatic experiences he must have had as a child to make him into such a monster."

Sergeant Cord, obviously unconvinced that factors other than innate evilness turned people to crime, merely grunted. By now having consumed three cookies and his glass of milk, he rose to his feet.

"Well, I'll be running along now, Miss Henry," he said. "Thank you for the delicious cookies and for the milk."

"You're welcome, Sergeant."

She accompanied him to the door. Standing in the open doorway, he beckoned to Officer Dewey, who was seated on a small wooden bench directly across from the elevator.

When the young policeman came over, Sergeant Cord said, "You're to accompany Miss Henry if she decides to go out anywhere, Harry. But phone in where you're going, and be sure to give the apartment a thorough check when you come back."

"Sure, Sarge."

"I'm sending over a police-woman named Gladys Phelps early this evening," the sergeant said. "When do you go off duty?"

"Six p.m."

"Well, you'll be gone before she gets here, so tell your relief to expect her. She will spend the night in the apartment." He turned to Josephine to append reassuringly, "The guard out here and the one out back will still be on duty around the clock, Miss Henry. A policewoman on the premises is merely extra precaution."

"Yes, I understand, Sergeant."

"What time do you actually have dinner?"

"About five-thirty."

"Then if Officer Phelps got here at six-thirty, you should be all through?"

"Yes, but she can come for dinner, if she would like," Josephine offered.

"Oh, that won't be necessary."

"I know it isn't necessary," Josephine said. "But I often had Mrs. Murphy for dinner when she was guarding me six months ago, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I assure you she's quite welcome."

"Well, I'll pass on your invitation and see what she says."

"You would be equally welcome, Sergeant, if you want to come back when she does."

"Why, thank you," Sergeant Cord said in a slightly startled voice. "But unfortunately I have other plans. Thanks again for the cookies and milk."

"Again you're quite welcome, Sergeant."

She and the young patrolman watched the detective cross to the elevator, press the call button and get on when the car came to the fourth floor.

As soon as the elevator door closed, Josephine said, "Would you like some cookies, Officer Dewey?"

The odor of the cookies had crept into the hallway through the open door. He said in a grateful tone, "Why that would be very kind of you, ma'am."

"All right, come on in," she said, stepping aside.

When he looked doubtful, she said, "You'll hardly be deserting your post, young man. It seems to me you'll be much better protection inside the apartment than out here in the hallway. Suppose this Clayton man got past your guard out back and picked the lock of my back door?"

"That makes sense, ma'am," Harry Dewey said with a grin.

He went over to lift his visored cap from where he had laid it on the wooden bench where he had

been seated, and followed her into the front room. He laid his cap on the end table nearest the door.

"You may sit right over there where the sergeant was," Josephine said, pointing. "Would you like tea or milk with your cookies?"

It took the young patrolman as long to think over these choices as it had the sergeant. Eventually he opted for milk. There was still a dozen cookies on the plate, so Josephine didn't bother to replenish it. But she carried the sergeant's empty glass into the kitchen and returned with another filled with milk.

Harry Dewey gratified Josephine by eating eight of her cookies. When he finished the last one and had drained his milk glass, he stood up and said, "Thank you very much, ma'am. They were delicious. I guess I had better get back to my post."

"Why?" she inquired. "You're not in my way. I'm going to be in the kitchen for a time, preparing dinner, then I plan to nap while it's baking in the oven. At my age I start yawning about seven if I don't have an afternoon nap. You're welcome to sit here and watch television, if you wish. As a matter of fact you're welcome to stay for dinner."

"Thank you, but my wife will be expecting me." Then, beginning to realize that the hospitable ex-schoolteacher tossed out dinner invitations to anyone who hap-

pened to be nearby, he forestalled her possible later disappointment by saying, "The man who believes me will already have eaten."

"Oh?" she said, mildly surprised by this gratuitous information. "Well, you're still welcome to watch TV in here, if you wish."

"I guess I could do that," the young policeman said, going over to peer at the set. "There's a ball game on channel four."

"Would you like some more milk? Or a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you," he said politely. Then, after a pause, he asked tentatively, "Do you happen to have any coffee?"

"Oh, of course. I never think of coffee, because I never drink it. I'll make some."

She made a pot of coffee, replenished the plate of cookies, and left Harry Dewey to his own devices as she prepared dinner. She fixed stuffed pork chops, wrapped some potatoes in foil for baking, and made a salad. She put the first two items in the oven and the third in the refrigerator. At four-thirty she turned on the oven, set the timer to go off in an hour, then went into her bedroom for an hour's nap.

When the bell ringing in the kitchen awakened her at five-thirty, she found the patroman still seated before the television and the cookie plate nearly empty. In the kitchen she checked the chops and potatoes, found both

done, and turned the oven down to 150 to keep them warm. For a vegetable she started heating frozen peas in a pot.

At a quarter of six she was ready to serve dinner, but the police-woman had not yet showed up. She had about decided she wasn't coming until after dinner, and had resigned herself to dining alone, when the door chimes sounded. She looked out from the kitchen door as Officer Dewey peered through the spy-hole, then opened the door into the hall.

"Hi," a pleasantly husky voice said from beyond Josephine's range of vision. "I'm Gladys Phelps."

"Harry Dewey," the young man said. "Come on in."

A tall strawberry blonde with a slender figure entered. She carried a small overnight bag in her left hand, and had a shoulder bag slung from her right shoulder. She wore a blue police uniform with a knee-length skirt, sensible low-heeled black shoes, and had a blue overseas-type hat perched at an angle on her head. Josephine guessed her to be somewhere in her mid-twenties.

"This is Miss Henry, Gladys," Dewey said. "Officer Phelps, Miss Henry."

The policewoman smiled acknowledgment. Josephine said, "I'm glad you could make it in time for dinner. You haven't had dinner, have you?"

Shaking her head, the straw-

berry blonde said in her pleasantly husky voice, "No."

Harry Dewey said, "I go off duty in fifteen minutes, Gladys, but another guard will be stationed out in the hall all night. There's also one out back, checking everyone who enters by the back entrance."

The policewoman nodded understanding.

"I'd better get out in the hall to wait for my relief. Thanks for the refreshments, Miss Henry."

"You're quite welcome, young man."

Picking up his visored cap, the patrolman went out. Eyeing the newcomer's left hand and spotting no rings, Josephine said, "It's Miss Phelps, not Mrs. Phelps, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am. Or Gladys, if you like."

"All right, Gladys," Josephine said, smiling. "I have only one bedroom, but the sofa makes up into a quite comfortable double bed. There's a dressing room off the bedroom where you can leave your overnight bag." She gestured in the direction of the central hall.

"Thanks," the policewoman said, carrying the bag down the hallway and disappearing into the dressing room.

The door chimes sounded. The policewoman immediately reappeared in the central hall doorway.

Josephine said, "That must be

my little dog. He's due back from the doggie beauty parlor about now."

She went over to peer through the viewing hole. It was the same messenger who had picked up the dog, now wearing a suit of mannish cut in place of the orange coveralls. She had Coco Joe cradled in her arms. The Pomeranian was growling in the direction of the bench alongside the door, presumably at Officer Dewey.

Opening the door, Josephine took the little dog from the messenger's arms. His coat was shiny clean, he was freshly trimmed, and a little purple bow had been pinned to the top of his head with a hairpin.

"Hi, you fierce beast," Josephine said. "Was he good?"

"Just darling. See you next week, Miss Henry."

"All right, dear. Good night."

Closing the door, she set Coco Joe on the floor. Instantly the dog whipped across the room, snarling and snapping at the police-woman's ankles. A defensive kick sent him rolling head-over-heels, squealing, toward Josephine, who scooped him up in her arms.

Apparently the kick had hurt only his dignity, because he immediately began to struggle to get out of her grip, snarling and growling at the policewoman all the time.

"What's the matter with you, you silly little dog?" Josephine

scolded him, slapping lightly at his muzzle. "Stop it now! She's a friend."

When the dog finally quieted to the point of merely emitting low-toned growls, Josephine said apologetically, "I'm sorry. I don't know what's gotten into him. I'd better lock him in the bedroom until he quiets down."

The policewoman stepped out of the way to allow her to carry the dog down the hallway to the bedroom. As she closed the bedroom door behind her, Josephine started to say, "You bad little —" then suddenly cut it off and stood stock still.

Coco Joe never made a mistake about the sex of visitors to the apartment. The masculine attire, masculine figure and masculine hairdo of the *Canine Beauty Care Center* messenger had not fooled him for an instant. He had known she was female anyway.

Just as the policewoman's garb had not fooled him. He had known the intruder was male.

Josephine's skin turned cold. The person who claimed to be Gladys Phelps was about five-feet-six or seven, probably weighed around 135 pounds, had blue eyes and a rather boyish face.

But hadn't the voice been feminine? Not markedly, she answered herself, just not obviously masculine. And the supposed Gladys Phelps had said very few words, now that she thought of it, had so far been almost

monosyllabic in fact — perhaps because it was a strain to assume that husky, almost feminine voice.

But what about the strawberry blonde hair?

The answer to that was simple. Every department store in town sold woman's wigs. You could get a quite natural-looking one for as little as twenty-five dollars.

But that would involve advance planning on James Clayton's part. How could he possibly have guessed that a policewoman would be heading for her apartment in time to go buy a wig before intercepting her? And how did he know her name?

Setting Coco Joe on the bed, she went over to gaze out the window at the street four stories below while she sought answers to those two questions.

They came disturbingly quickly. He had seen the front-page photograph, six months before, of Josephine and her policewoman bodyguard seated in the apartment. The police, like criminals, tended to follow a certain *modus operandi*. James Clayton could be reasonably certain they would assign another policewoman guard to Josephine if they suspected he was the killer of Mrs. Sommerfield. Perhaps the list of potential victims had not been left behind on that poor woman's dresser by accident after all. Perhaps it had been deliberately planted in order to make sure another policewoman

guard was assigned to Josephine.

The answer to the second question was even easier. The killer had gotten Gladys Phelps' name from her identification card after he killed her.

If she had not been so frightened, Josephine might have felt admiration for the deviousness of the man's plot. It would have been considerably easier and less dangerous for him to have come direct from Mrs. Sommerfield's murder last night to Josephine's apartment. But this way he could demonstrate to the whole world, and specifically to the remaining twelve potential victims, that police protection meant nothing once James Clayton singled you out. Despite Sergeant Cord's assertion that his demand for the release of Dolores Pitton from prison could not even be considered, and her agreement with the assertion, there undoubtedly would be strong pressure from at least some of the survivors to do just that, if he succeeded in murdering Josephine under the very noses of the police.

Josephine resolved to do everything in her power to prevent him from succeeding.

Unfortunately none of her apartment windows overlooked the back, or she might have dropped a note to the guard back there. She contemplated, then discarded, simply casually walking to the front door, suddenly darting out into the hall and calling to

Officer Dewey that the police-woman was James Clayton in disguise. That probably would only get the young policeman killed too, because it was too much to expect for him to react quickly enough to do anything as unnatural to his instincts as shooting what seemed to be a policewoman before the bandit got in the first shot.

All at once it occurred to her that Officer Dewey had already been remarkably lucky in not being personally acquainted with Gladys Phelps. The killer must have simply taken a brazen chance on that; planning to draw the gun that undoubtedly was in that shoulder bag and start shooting if anyone accused him of being an imposter.

Realizing the fake policewoman would probably become suspicious and come looking for her if she didn't reappear soon, she decided she had better come up with a plan of defense at once. But any defensive action necessarily depended on the killer's plan of attack. Did he mean to dispose of her quickly, or to wait until she was asleep, as Mrs. Sommerfield had been?

Putting herself in the killer's place, she decided the problem of getting by the guard in the outer hall threw the odds with him waiting until she was asleep. In the morning the policewoman guard was expected to leave, because she only stayed in the

apartment nights. The killer could simply tell the outside guard that Josephine was still sleeping, walk past him and get on the elevator.

Then it occurred to her it would be just as simple for him to walk out five minutes from now on the pretense of going downstairs to get some cigarettes from the machine in the lobby.

Glancing at her watch, she saw it was five of six. She was reasonably certain James Clayton would not time the murder within the next few minutes, because he knew the changeover of hallway guards was due to take place at six. There would be no point in timing the killing when there might be two policemen outside the door. Logically he would wait until at least a few minutes after six, so that in case anything went wrong, he would have to contend with only one police guard.

Looking into her dresser mirror, she realized she was too pale to fool anyone into believing she wasn't frightened half out of her wits. Deliberately she held her breath until her face became beet red. When she finally let it out, her color gradually faded, but only back to its normal tint.

Ordering Coco Joe to stay on the bed, she went out into the hallway and shut the door behind her to keep the dog in the bedroom. Squaring her shoulders and sternly reminding herself that her life depended on her acting per-

fectly natural, she marched up the hallway to the front room.

The pseudo-policewoman had one ear to the front door, trying to hear what went on in the front hall. The shoulder bag still hung from the imposter's shoulder.

Josephine's resolve shattered, and she became absolutely terrified.

Yet when the man in police-woman's uniform turned to give her a sharp look, she found herself saying in a natural tone, despite her screaming nerves, "Why don't you take off your cap, dear?"

Summoning a smile, the imposter removed the little blue cap and laid it on the same table where Officer Dewey had put his. Josephine breathed a sigh of relief, because that put her over the first hurdle of her plan.

"Dinner is all ready," she said. "You don't mind eating in the kitchen, do you?"

Without waiting for a reply, she walked into the kitchen, stiff-legged to keep her body from shaking with terror. The pseudo-policewoman followed.

Pausing next to the electric stove to give the simmering peas a stir, Josephine pointed to the chair whose back was to the stove and said, "Sit there, please, Gladys."

Hanging the shoulder bag over the back of the chair, the imposter sat. Josephine stooped as though to open the oven door, but instead

drew out the drawer beneath it and quietly lifted out the largest of her iron skillets.

With her right hand she raised the skillet high overhead. With her left she suddenly plunked off the wig. She had a double motive for doing the latter. She was afraid the wig would cushion the blow, and she wanted to make absolutely sure the person she was braining was not a policewoman after all.

The hair beneath the wig was straw-colored and crewcut. Josephine smashed the iron skillet down on top of it with all her might. The imposter half rose from his chair, glanced around with glazing eyes, and pitched sideways onto the floor.

Setting the skillet on the stove, Josephine grabbed up the shoulder bag and raced to the front door. When she flung it open, she found two policemen in the hallway. Officer Dewey was in the act of punching the elevator button. Standing with him was an equally large, but middle-aged policeman.

"Come quick!" Josephine gasped. "I just captured James Clayton!"

The bandit was still unconscious when the two policemen got to the kitchen. As a matter of fact he was still unconscious when the ambulance got there, although the intern who came with it told Josephine he thought the man had only a severe concussion instead of

a fracture, and no doubt would live.

While awaiting the ambulance, the middle-aged officer had gone searching for the real Gladys Phelps, leaving Officer Dewey with Josephine and the prisoner. He found her on the roof, not dead as Josephine had feared, but obviously left for dead. She had been knocked unconscious by some kind of blunt instrument, then, after removing her uniform, her assailant had slipped his knife into her back.

The intern who had declared James Clayton in no real danger of dying seemed to think the police-woman had every chance of surviving too. He said that the very fact she ws still alive indicated that knife blade had neither penetrated the heart nor any other vital spot, and that a few stitches and some blood transfusions ought to pull her through.

Josephine resolved that as soon as Gladys Phelps recovered, she would have the policewoman over to make up for the dinner she had missed.

It was nearly eight p.m. by the time everyone, including the police, had left, and Josephine could have dinner. By then the baked chops were a little dried out, but they were still good. She shared them with Coco Joe.

Custumarily he ate dog food, but she felt he deserved the special treat. After all, he'd saved her life.

FREAK OUT

by Paul Powlesland

Killing is sometimes the easy part. What's difficult is getting rid of the body!

THE COPS ASKED ME where Riley was so I told them. But they didn't take me serious. Nobody does. You think you got it bad? You walk with a limp? Your group's got more cavities than theirs? You suffer from perspiration odor? All these are temporary and curable. When you've got a problem like mine ...

Midge, a tiny doll-like midget with beautiful shiny, white-blond hair (she used to let me comb it for her sometimes) was the star of our travelling carnival, billed as RILEY'S FREAK PARADISE. We played two-or three-night stands all year round in every legitimate carny town.

Speaking of legitimate, Midge's son J.R. Period wasn't. He was like Gloucester's son — Edmund or Edgar? I can never keep them straight. They say the other one was a real s.o.b., too. See, just because a guy ain't got no Donny Osmond profile don't mean he can't pick up a little book-learning.

But that was Midge's affair.

Nobody around the show said anything about it, just took it for granted. But one thing *none* of us took for granted was Midge herself. How could we? She stood between us freaks and Riley and his whip. We still have red welts across our backs as evidence of what Riley did to every single one of us, but we would've had more if Midge hadn't protected us.

What happened took place on a Saturday night.

Everybody was busy breaking down tents.

Riley was a black-arts worshipper and all us put up with that because we had to. The carny wasn't exactly paradise, but there aren't too many places people like us can make a buck outside the carny.

I just happened to be passing Midge's tent at the time when she usually gave J.R. Period his bath. She did it the same time every night. But this time, instead of hearing the baby's happy gurgling

sounds, I heard Riley's voice casting a spell or something; you know, all that black-arts mumbo-jumbo. When I heard Midge crying, I edged closer.

"Thou hast sinned grievously, woman," Riley was saying, "by bringing this bastard child into the world!"

A whimper.

My fists balled.

Riley's voice grew louder, more menacing. "By official decree of the Royal Court of Lucifer and the power invested in me —"

I had to do something. I grabbed a hunk of wood, ripped through the tent flap, stopped, my mouth hanging open. My eyes popped. Riley had J.R. Period lifted way up high, upside down, holding onto him with one hand around the kid's ankle. And in the other hand Riley had a twelve-inch double-bladed knife, ready to cut!

And they call us freaks!

My entrance didn't bother Riley a bit. He didn't even look at me. He intoned solemnly, "I hereby declare that his child shall —"

"Live!" I cried to distract him.

And I threw the hunk of wood.

It caught Riley alongside the head. The baby squirted out of his grip and into Midge's waiting arms. Riley hit the ground, howling more with anger than pain. Blood was oozing from a cut on his temple. He glared at me as though he wanted to kill me and rose, smiling, the knife ready for a new victim.

I made a dive for the piece of wood, grabbed it and turned just as Riley came after me. Desperation drove my arm with the wood in it into his ribs. A piece broke off. I hit him again, blindly, trying to avoid the slashing knife — and the jagged remainder slammed into his flesh, tearing it. Even when he was on the ground, lying very still, bleeding, I kept hitting him until Midge pulled me off.

Afterward, there was only one place I could think of to dump the body.

When the cops came and asked me if I knew where Riley was, I told them I'd killed him and put him in the cook's kettle. They looked at me and just laughed. People are always doing that, but this time I didn't mind. One of them even looked in the kettle, just to make sure, but all he saw was a vat of thick, steaming stew.

He looked at me and laughed again. They didn't take me serious. Nobody does. You think you got it bad? I'm telling you, a dog-faced boy in a freak show doesn't get any respect at all.

The next day was Sunday.

We all met over a meal with Midge, all of us freaks, talked it over, and decided to disband, most of us trying to hitch up with another travelling carny.

I went with Midge, to look after her and J.R. Period.

Riley's body was never found. Dinner was very good that last day.

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DETECTIVE QUIZ

How much do you know about fictional detectives? Probably more than this simple quiz would indicate. But just for fun, try it anyway. The answers are printed upside down at the bottom of the page.

1. Whom did Sherlock Holmes consider "The second most dangerous man in London"?
2. What actor played *Michael Shayne, Private Detective* on radio?
3. Who portrayed him in the movie?
4. Whose motto was: "Enemy to those who make him an enemy, friend to those who have no friend."
5. The persistent detective who pursued Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables* was (a) Inspector Clouseau
(b) Inspector Maigret (c) Inspector Javert
(d) Inspector Japp
6. What is The Lone Wolf's real name?
7. In the pulp magazines, Kent Allard was better known to the underworld as _____.
8. What were Mr. & Mrs. North's first names?
9. To Sherlock Holmes, she is always *the woman*. What is her name?
10. What was the name of Sam Spade's partner, killed in *The Maltese Falcon*?

ANSWERS

- Archer
7 - The Shadow 8 - Jerry and Pamela 9 - Irene Adler 10 - Miles
4 - Boston Blackie 5 - Inspector Javert 6 - Michael Lanyard
1 - Colonel Sebastian Moran 2 - Jeff Chandler 3 - Lloyd Nolan

STIFF COMPETITION

Book Reviews

by John Ball

A GOOD TEST FOR ANY BOOK is how well it sticks in the mind. Some once put down are quickly forgotten; others refuse to go away and the people in them remain in the reader's thoughts, sometimes indefinitely. Such a book is *A Clutch of Vipers* by Jack S. Scott. Mr. Scott must be reckoned a major find. His plot is good, his writing is superior, but his people, those who pass through his story, leap off the page and become living, breathing things. The scene is England. A veteran policeman who has been demoted because of an indiscretion with a woman falls victim to a particularly vicious criminal who wants to see him totally destroyed. The unrelenting chief constable becomes a major force, as does a baby-faced thirteen-year-old girl who radiates virginal purity and who, at her age, is already a star in pornographic films. The ending is ironic, and potent. This is not Mr. Scott's first book — he has done three others we have not seen — but based on this performance, he may well become one of the giants in the genre. (Harper and Row, \$8.95)



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Michael Innes is a special case where mystery writing is concerned. He is, in reality, Dr. J.I.M. Stewart of Oxford University. As Michael Innes he has an impressively long list of published titles, of which *The Ampersand Papers* is the latest. As might be expected, he writes with great skill and his use of the English language is a delight. He is not for those who demand instant action, hard-boiled private eyes, and passionate wenches. Instead he writes for those who would like, at the end of a tough day, to sit down with a "good book."

Michael Innes' detective is retired Scotland Yard Commissioner Sir John Appleby. Sir John appears in this work at his quiet, persuasive best. An old castle inhabited by a titled family may have some valuable unpublished works by great nineteenth century romantics among its stored papers. The aristocrats, however, are largely equipped with ingrown mentalities. From these elements Innes weaves an engaging tale and introduces some unusually interesting personalities. (Dodd Mead, \$7.95)



The Fields of Eden by Michael Hinkemeyer takes us to rural Minnesota, where local politicos are trying to unseat unschooled but sincere Sheriff Whippletree, in order to give the job to their own well-unqualified candidate. The Sheriff is not a mental giant, and he is made to look bad at every opportunity, but he has experience and a valid honesty that is his best defense. The author gives a clear and vivid picture of midwestern county politics. There is little action after the initial brutal murder of five members of a local minister's family, but the author maintains interest up to the genuinely unexpected finish. (Putnam, \$7.95)

★ ★ ★

A standard attraction in the literature is the periodic anthologies prepared and edited by the grand master, Ellery Queen. His latest offering in this category is *Scenes of the Crime*, a hard cover volume that contains 25 stories from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. There are now 33 of these anthologies, and there isn't a bad one in the lot. This newest offering boasts such names as Stanley Ellin, Georges Simenon, Ruth Rendell, Michael Gilbert, Brian Garfield, and (who's that again?) John Ball. Seriously, at least 24 of the stories are notable and a lot of good reading can be had for \$8.95. (The Dial Press and

Davis Publishing, Inc.)

★ ★ ★

The red herring is a standard feature of many mysteries, but no book in recent years has such a commanding one as *Wycliffe and the Scapegoat*. Or is it a red herring? Chief Superintendent Wycliffe has a bit too much rank to do much of his own legwork, but otherwise he is a believable policeman who walks sometimes rather than rides, so that he will have more time to think. Think he does as he untangles a complex case which involves a Halloween celebration in which a huge wheel, with the stuffed figure of a man lashed to it, is rolled down a cliff and over a high jump into the sea. When a body disappears, or a possible body, you know what everyone is thinking. Yes or no remains a question throughout most of the book and there are some side issues that also command attention. A good if not a great effort. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

★ ★ ★

Angus Ross offers a new espionage novel in *The Burgos Contract*. The writing style is much more in the adventure mold, and it is this category that the story best fits. The protagonist is an experienced agent, but he makes a number of careless as-

sumptions that, of course, prove to be serious errors. As an adventure tale the book moves swiftly, with enough action to please most readers. There is a Russian female spy who, for a change, is a bitter opponent of our hero and the showdown between the two is a high point of the story. (Walker, \$7.95)

★ ★ ★

For a considerable time Penguin Books has made available some of the best crime fiction in a much better than average paperback reprint series. Now Penguins are in the American market, where they should find a cordial welcome. Purely mechanically, the paper is superior and the type, for the most part, is clear and readable.

A number of titles now available in Penguin are of interest. Otto Penzler's anthology *The Great Detectives* includes essays by a series of top crime writers on their own creations. Donald Hamilton writes on Matt Helm, Dame Ngaio Marsh on Roderick Alleyn, Ross Macdonald on Lew Archer, and so on. A most interesting book. Another Sherlockian pastiche *Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula* matches these two bloodhounds, of different sorts, in a newly-discovered manuscript by Dr. Watson. Its history is detailed before the story begins, as is proper. Loren Estleman did the

editing, according to the by-line.

Other recent Penguin titles include James Atwater's *Time Bomb*, *Code Name Hangman* by Paul Geddes, and *To Catch a Spy* by Chris Scott, a work based on the infamous defection of Burgess and Maclean to the Soviet Union. In the field of the horror story, Penguin offers Geoffrey Household's *Dance of the Dwarfs* which is set in South America. The New York Times called it "superb" and we won't argue. Penguins sell in the United States from \$1.95 to \$3.95, depending in part on length. One nice feature: on the rear cover in the lower right hand corner there is a category listing so that the reader knows just what he is buying before making a final selection. Incidentally, the familiar green backstrap has been replaced by red in some editions.

★ ★ ★

Julian Symons, the British critic, poet, and distinguished crime writer has undertaken a new biography and study of Poe, a work based on his own dissatisfaction with previous biographies of the dark genius who created the detective story as it is known today. Mr. Symons has separated his book into two sections: first the life of Poe; then his works. Under the title, *The Tell-Tale Heart* he has taken a careful scholar's look at America's

greatest man of letters to date. The new biography gives generous evidence of careful research and a minimum of speculation not supported by sound data. For example, Mr. Symons gives valid details in his account of Poe at West Point, where he was possibly the least apt cadet that the famed academy had ever received. Nevertheless, Poe did distinguish himself in French (the only language taught) and his interest in science was greatly strengthened.

In the second half of the book Mr. Symons examines Poe's poems and his seventy stories with a critic's eye, neither castigating nor worshipful. Poe wrote some things which survive simply because they are by him, just as a very early, and doubtful, piano concerto is preserved because its composer may quite possibly have been Beethoven. It is sufficient to note here that Mr. Symons' work must be considered an important addition to the literature about Poe. (Harper and Row, \$10.95)

Continued from Page 4

From RICHARD DEMING comes this mini-biography: "Author of forty books under my own name, forty-two under various other names, and several hundred short stories. Sixty-eight of the books have been novels, mostly mystery, crime, adventure and suspense; fourteen have been non-fiction, on such varied subjects as biography, criminalistics, criminal, civil and international law, sleep research, and the metric system. Also am handsome, charming, and incredibly rich."

PAUL POWLESLAND is a name new to our pages — or to any pages, for that matter, since *Freak Out* is his first published story. Paul lives with his lovely wife Carolyn in Utica, New York, the hometown of Annette Funicello and Dick Clark, neither of whom has ever had a story published in *Mike Shayne*. Eat your hearts out, Annette and Dick!

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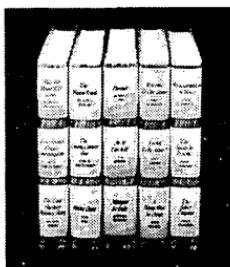
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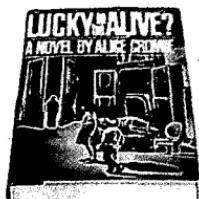
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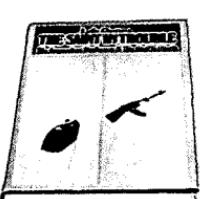
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